

Telugu Novel

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TELUGU NOVEL

VOLUME ONE

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YUVABHARATHI

A LITERARY AND CULTURAL ORGANISATION
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TELUGU NOVEL
VOLUME ONE

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS
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TWELVE SELECTED TELUGU NOVELS

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...being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the philosopher, and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog.

The novel is the one bright book of life.

— D H. LAWRENCE.

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Yuvabharathi is Grateful

An open disclosure does not discharge us
from the debt but does declare humbly
our gratitude.

So many richly deserve to be thanked
wholeheartedly!

I do not attempt to list them fully-
because I know I cannot exhaust.

Really speaking,
it is the voluntary, spontaneous and
unsolicited support of some good-hearted
people that still keeps us going.
It's really they who deserve the praise
and we keep getting the congratulations;
and look ! some of them insist
on remaining anonymous.

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(the artist, who incidentally has also
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to the quality of the outcome;

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to our advertisers;

to our printers;

and to a host of others.

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TELUGU NOVEL
would not have become a reality,

and to Dr. M. SIVARAMKRISHNA,
the man behind the project,
whose painstaking efforts
are amply visible throughout.

V. VISWANADHAM
Convener

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YUVABHARATHI IS GRATEFUL

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A Word On Behalf of The Editors....



YUVABHARATI has completed a decade of dedicated service to the cause of Telugu literature and culture. Eastablished in 1963 by an enthusiastic and energetic band of young men inspired by the ideal of instilling, as widely as possible, an awareness of the literary and cultural heritage of the Telugu people, YUVABHARATI has earned for itself, during the years, a distinct place in the contemporary Telugu cultural field.

We have, elsewhere in this volume, articulated the aims and objectives of our institution. We have appended, also, extracts of what others have to say regarding not only our intention but also our concertization of this intention into purposive programmes and projects. Therefore, it suffices to say here that YUVABHARATI has always kept before itself the twin objectives of revitalizing the heritage of the past so as to bring it into meaningful relation with the present, and in this process to actualize the potential creative energies of youth. The emphasis, therefore, is not only on interpretation of the achievement of the vital past but also of the dynamic present. Towards the achievement of these objectives YUVABHARATI designed and executed a number of projects. While we have our fortnightly sessions meant to generate a sense of maturity and confidence in youth in articulating their problems, out intention of bringing about an awareness of Telugu literary achievement in the layman assumed concrete form in a dual way: through discourses on distinguished Telugu men of letters by acknowledged authorities in the field and the publication of these, later, in the more permanant form of books and monographs placed in the hands of a wide circle of literary enthusiasts: *Sahitimitra*. Above all, we consistently stuck to the view that literature, to be meaningful and effective, must be within the reach of the common man: both price-wise and content-wise.

YUVABHARATI's consistent efforts in this direction are reflected in the range of publications it has to its credit. With a total number of more than thirty publications, (with more than 200,000 copies made available) Yuvabharati can, we feel, legitimately take pride in the role it continues to play in popularizing literature and bringing it into the focus of the common reader. With the overall motto of CLASSICS TO THE MASSES as its crystallized intention, YUVABHARATI successfully launched a number of schemes entitled LAHARI SERIES: LITERARY WAVELETS. These

were designed to acquaint the average reader with the contribution made by classical as well as contemporary litterateures to the enrichment of Telugu culture. The poets and artists chosen for revaluation and reinterpretation included the pillars of Telugu literary culture: Nannaya, Tikkana, Peddana, Srinatha, Vemana, Gurajada, Veeresalingam, Viswanatha and Sri Sri. Scholars who participated in this *Sahitee Yajna* included stalwarts in contemporary Telugu literature such as Professor Divakarla Venkata Avadhani, Sri Puttaparti Narayanacharya, Dr. C. Narayana Reddi, Sri Arudra, Sri Dasarathi, Dr. G.V. Subrahmanyam and others. Their lectures drew huge and appreciative audience and it was, indeed, a treat to find so many with manifest love of literature responding spontaneously. All these lectures which evoked tremendous enthusiasm later assumed the permanant form of books: such as *Kovya Lahari, Vikasa Lahari, Chaitanya Lahari* and ***Pratibha Lahari***. The 1975 programme under this series is entitled *Kavitha Lahari.*

YUVABHARATI also successfully conducted symposiums on topics of vital significance such as "Changing Values and the Responsibilities of Writers" (later collected in book form as *Rachana*).

We are aware that YUVABHARATI's intention to inclucate a sense of intellectual adventure among the young by instilling an awareness of literary and cultural values has many miles to go before it becomes a rooted reality. But the process is set in motion. Ere long we hope that this dynamic literary efflux will engulf all literary lovers in the common cause of a cultural renaissance.

It is out of our commitment to the cause of furthering and intensifying awareness and appreciation of Telugu literary heritage that the project TELUGU NOVEL emerged. YUVABHARATI has aleady published one book in English: *FREE INDIA FORGES AHEAD*, a collection of essays on the achievement of India in different fields—social, political, economic and literary—during the twenty five years of its freedom. This book may be said to be the beginning of another dimension of the activities of YUVABHARATI widening the circle of readers by throwing its publishing projects open to non-Telugu reading public. TELUGU NOVEL, however, is the first to give a tanigible shape to this intention to extend and widen the awareness of Telugu literary heritage far beyond the shores of its origin.

It can hardly be gainsaid that in a country like India, with its almost bewildering linguistic diversity, cultural integration requires appreciation of literatures other than one's own. It is primarily with this intention—of introducing the achievement of the Telugu novel to non-Telugu readers—that the present project is launched.

The rationale of the enterprise is obvious: though stray articles on different aspects of Telugu literature continue to appear in poriodicals such

as *Indian Literature*, *The Indian P.E.N.*, *Triveni* and *Quest*, the overall achievement in a specific field has not been presented, we feel, in all its variety and diversity. Moreover, the efforts so far have been dissipated by lack of the proper climate of opinion in which alone appreciation of literatures other than one's own is possible.

TELUGU NOVEL is, thus, *Yuvabharati's* maiden attempt in a new direction and this is a prelude, we hope, of many such projects awaiting concretization. A word of explantation is needed with regard to the choice of the form. Why novel and not poetry or drama ?

The genre of the novel was our initial choice for several reasons: it is not only the most popular of contemporary literary forms, but also one in which contemporary existence is articulated in all its complexity through contexts and situations recognizably real. Hence, the Telugu novels chosen present a cross section of the contemporary socio-political milieu. Moreover: Telugu writers have shown unusual competence in this the most modern of literary forms. Above all, the Telugu novel is now a hundred years old and as such it is time to take stock of its multifaceted achievement. This stock-taking should be done, we felt, not in the insular atmosphere of mutual appreciation, but in the broad perspective afforded when it is evaluated in English. As can be seen from the essays, the tone has not been uncritically adulatory but objective and detached.

In regard to the choice of the novels, a word of explanation is needed to avoid controversy and misunderstanding. With the alarmingly increasing quantum of novels published, the problem of choice is, indeed, insurmountable. This would involve a rigid adherence to and awareness of the distinction between the two poles of fiction: the journalistic and the literary Since this distinction is capable of different formulations, we felt that one way to resolve the choice—between popularity and enduring significance—is to have the dual criteria of 'tradition' and 'individual talent'. Hence the novelists included in this volume represent these two indispensable criteria: those seminal figures who founded the tradition of the novel in Telugu and those who have shown strikingly original creativity even while conforming to or deviating from the overall tradition. Therefore, the novels chosen are ***representative*** not *exhaustive* of the richness of Telugu fiction. All that is attempted is to present a cross-section of Telugu fictional talent. Therefore, the actual arrangament of the novels is guided by the alphabetical order and not by any arbitrary editorial awarding of degrees of merit. We have left it to the reader lo evolve for himself his own chart of Telugu fictional achievement in the lrght of the essays. Only in this reciprocal way does the book achieve its legitimate intention.

The aim of the editorial committee in coordinating the contributions was to ensure a full appreciation of the novel in question. Therefore, the overall design of presentation is :

1. The first section consists of relevant information about the novel: the year of publication, main characters, time of action, locale etc.

2. This is followed by an Editorial Note in which the overall achievement of the novelist is summed up. As such it seeks to supplement and not supplant the remarks made by the contributors.

3. The third section comprises a brief synopsis of the story of the novel highlighting the main events. This is meant to acquaint the reader with the framework of the novel which is an indispensable preliminary for any appreciation of its significance.

4. The final section presents the essay which introduces the novelist.

Our original intention was to publish these essays in a single volume. But circumstances over which we had little control compelled us to split the book into two volumes. The second volume containing the rest of the essays will be in your hands within a month or two.

It will also be noticed that there is a separate section in which two of our editors seek to place the achievement of the Telugu novel in world perspective. The essay by Dr. A. Ramapathi Rao, while giving a bird's-eye view of the origin and development of the Telugu novel, has an additional significance since Dr. Rao himself is a novelist of admitted eminence. Similarly, Dr. Ramakrishna Rao, an eminent Telugu writer himself, has tried to bring out the significance of the Telugu novel vis-a-vis the world literary scene.

In regard to the essays by the contributors, a word of editorial explanation is warranted. The editor's job is always a thankless one since it involves a number of extremely sensitive decisions likely to bedevil the human element. With regard to the present collection, we were constrained to effect some changes in the essays both contextual and verbal. This is done, we would like to add, not out of a perverse desire to 'touch up' another's writing—born out of literary vanity—but only in the interests of clarity and to make it conform with the intentions of the book. Therefore, the changes made were mainly verbal and rigorously kept to the minimum. We therefore, request all contributors to bear with us in this regard.

We do hope that this project will commend itself to all lovers of literature.

M. Sivaramkrishna.

Convener

Telugu Novel Editorial

Committee.

Telugu Novel:

A Bird's-Eye View

A. Ramapathi Rao (Manjusri)

TELUGU NOVEL celebrated its centenary in 1972. *Sonabai Parinayam* or *Sri Rangaraja Charitra* by Sri Narahari Gopalakrishnamma Shetty, published in 1872, is generally accepted by literary historians as the first novel in Telugu: novel as a distinct genre of literature concerned with the depiction of contemporary social conditions through recognizably real characters.

Sri Shetty himself described his book as "a modern *prabandha* (fictional work) depicting the customs and traditions of Hindus," and claimed that it was sqecifically designed to reflect the contemporary social conditions. This draws attention to the fact that the novel was already gaining recognition as an eminently suitable form for the portrayal of social problems. This tendency to draw the content of literature in general and the novel in particular from contemporary social conditions was reinforced by the encouragement given by the then Governor General Lord Mayo who announced a prize to prose fiction depicting the customs and traditions of society. Though this anouncement was specially meant for writers in the Bengali language, there can be little doubt that this gave the impetus to Sri Shetty himself who was then working as a Deputy Collector in Kurnool. It must have struck him that a similar attempt should be made in Telugu literature. The result is the publication of *Sri Rangaraja Charitra.* Though the characters retained traces of historical personages, it is significant that the story and the plot were original and not derivative from any legend or historical narrative. The book also contained criticism of many superstitions and outdated beliefs of conservative Hindu society. Though slender by today's standards, no wonder that the journals and the Government Gazette of the time unanimously described it as the first novel in Telugu.

While *Sri Rangaraja Charitra* has its own historical significance, it is, however, *Rajasekhara Charitra* by Sri Kandukuri Veeresalingam, published six years later (1878) which should be regarded as a distinct land mark in the development of the Telugu novel. In several ways it is of seminal significance. Wirtten by Sri Veeresalingam, the prophet of the Modern Age in Andhra, it was originally serialized in *Viveka Vardhini,* a periodical founded by Sri Veeresalingam himself. As such, *Rajasekhara Charitra* is the first Telugu novel to set the trend of serialization of novels in periodicals which continues to be a regular feature in Telugu literature.

In the initial stages, however, books such as *Rajasekhara Charitra* were described not as novels but simply as "prose fiction": *Vachana Prabandha.* This term was in vogue for more than twenty five years (It was also customary to give alternate titles such as, for instance, *Viveka Chandrika* for *Rajasekhara Charitra*). The transition from the term "vachana prabandha" to that of the "novel" began with Sri Kasibhatta Brahmayya Sastri who, in his critique of *Rajasekhara Charitra,* suggested that since this book generically belongs to the western fictional form, a synonymous word 'Navala' should be coined in Telugu to designate such works. Since then the term "navala" remained firmly rooted in usage. (This term, it is interesting to note, assumed different lexical forms in Indian languages such as, for instance, 'Upanyas' in Hindi.)

Sri Veeresalingam was obviously indebted to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield* (1766) in the overall conception of the theme and structure of his *Rajasekhara Charitra.* But the novel was not a translation but an adaptation in accordance with the milieu of Andhra *desa*. Therefore it cannot be regarded in any way as a derivative work. Moreover, in its thematic implications it had a far-ranging intention and significance, Since Sri Veeresalingam's central concern both as man and writer was the regeneration of Telugu society from stifling and oppressive traditions. *Rajasekhara Charitra* skilfully offers pervasive criticism of contemporary superstitions and sterile rituals. The evils of child-marriages, the plight of widows, beliefs in astrology and alchemy, the sterile traditional system of education, the tyranny of religious heads and many other corrupt practices of those times came in for severe c.itism in this novel. The criticism was so trenchant and the social relevance of the novel so pervasive that *The Hindu* hailed *Rajasekhara Charitra* as an oasis in the dreary desert of contemporary Telugu literature ridden with infantile romances and escapist fantasies.

Rajasekhara Charitra, therefore, by virtue of making social relevance and criticism as the basic concern, may be regarded as occupying a crucial place in the development of the Telugu novel. It is, indeed, a curious fact that it was later translated into English and published from London. Entitled *Fortune's Wheel,* it was rendered into English by Rev. Hutchinson (pub. in 1887) and received appreciative comments from *London Times.* Apart from English, the novel was also translated into the South Indian languages such as Kannada, Malayalam and Tamil. All these facts suggest the range of significant appreciation that the novel achieved in contemporary literary world.

Sri Veeresalingam also wrote another full-length social novel in Telugu called *Satyavati Charitramu.* This was serialized in *Satihita Bodhini,* a periodical established by Sri Veeresalingam himself specially for women. Written in 1883, the novel depicts the vicissitudes of the Hindu joint family in the process of modernization. With the affluent, predominantly agricultural coastal Andhra fertilized by the river Godavari as its setting and back-

ground, it depicts the plight of middle class life with family as its thematic nucleus. Since emancipation of women through education was regarded by Sri Veeresalingam as the clue to social regeneration, he described the plight of uneducated women in Hindu society with tenderness and sympathy. Through sharply drawn characters and carefully contrasting them, the novel successfully establishes its central thesis that family can remain an effective social institution only when both husband and wife are educated. In the absence of this, even if one of the partners is educated it is futile.

Veeresalingam, a versatile writer, also adapted Jonathan Swift's celebrated satire *Gulliver's Travels* in Telugu. Though the overall idea was a derivative one, *Satyaraja Poorvadesa Yatralu* shows once again originality and freshness of approach. It offered a satirical portrait of the atrocities and humiliation to which Indian women were subjected through the ages. This novel also was translated into Kannada and other South Indian languages. Sri Veeresalingam also wrote a short narrative entitled *Chandramati Charitra* based on the puranic legend of Harischandra.

Another landmark in the history of the Telugu novel was the establishment of a literary journal called ***Chintamani***. Started in 1893 and published from Rajahmundry, it sought to encourage the writing of enduring novels in Telugu by holding annual competitions. This was an inestimable service to the development of the Telugu novel, since the healthy competitive spirit spurred the emerging literary talent into meaningful activity It was in the pages of this periodical that Sri Chilakamarthi Lakshminarasimha Kavi, another significant Telugu novelist, made his debut. He wrote his celebrated novel *Sri Ramachandra Vijayam* for this competition and won a prize. These annual competitions of *Chintamani* were continued for about ten years and whenever Sri Chilakamarthi submitted a novel, it invariably won a prize. He also wrote many novels-such as *Hemalatha*, *Karpooramanjari*, *Ahalyabai*, *Soundaryatilaka* etc-for this journal. For his range, versatility and extreme readability, Sri Chilakamarti was hailed as the Sir Walter Scott of Andhra. He declared, however, Sri Veeresalingam as his literary mentor and acknowledged his *Rajasekhracharitra* and other books as his models. Thus Sri Veeresalingam and Sri Chilakamarti may justly be regarded as the founders of the tradition of the novel in Telugu.

One more significant step in the direction of firmly establishing the roots of the genre of the novel in Telugu literature was taken with the establishment, in the first decade of the present century, of major publishing series entitled *Vijnana Chandrtka Mandali*. Though it encouraged the writing of social novels, its main intention was to give fillip to historical fiction since it felt that this will awaken a sense of nationalistic fervour and pride in the dormant conciousness of the Hindus. It also inaugurated another variation in the novel: crime and detective fiction. Writers of undoubted eminence such as Bhogaraju Narayanamurti, Kethavarapu Venkata Sastri, Venkata Parvatheesa Kavulu, Devaraju Venkata Krishna Rao laid

the foundations of many variations such as historical, legendary, social and detective fiction.

All this draws attention to the fact that the genre of the novel acquired deep roots in Telugu literary field long before that of the short story—short story in its modern form—and assumed, by the first decade of the present century, thematic and structural variety. Even as early as 1910, for instance, Sri Kethavarapu Vankata Sastry's novel ***Lakshmi Prasadam*** vividly evoked the far ranging changes wrought in several fields, both social and individual (such as the family structure and the fate of married life) by western modes of life and thought. In the emergence of talented novelists such as Sri Venkata Sastri and in moulding their talent, *Vijnana Chandrika Mandali* played crucial role. Its impact—particularly in the regeneration of the nationalist spirit through a reinterpretation of Indian history—is to be found even on those who did not write directly for any of its literary competitions. Among these the most outstanding is Sri Sripada Subrahmanya Sastri whose novels such as *Mithunanuragam*, *Veerapooja* and *Visha Bhujangam* were published even before 1920.

By 1920 the movement for independence took a significant turn. With the death of Lokamanya Bala Gangadhara Tilak and the assumption of leadership by Gandhiji, the complexion of the movement underwent a dramatic change. This political change had had its inevitable impact on literature. As a result, there was a predominant emphasis on truth and non-violence, rooted in the ancient Upanishadic heritage, as the cherished ideals of the entire nation and the only means for the achievement of freedom from the foreign yoke. These ideals imbedded in the aspiration for total freedom invariably formed the thematic motifs of the literature of that time. It was during this renaissance of dynamic national consciousness that the novel *Malapalli* came to be written. Written by an ardent nationalist, Sri Unnava Lakshminarayana, it stands comparison with the best novels of similar stature in all the Indian languages. In regard to the development of the Telugu novel, *Malapalli* wrought a revolution both in regard to content and language. It was not only the first Telugu novel to use the easy, natural idiom of colloquial Telugu, but it was also instinct with so intense a nationalist fervour that it was proscribed by the British government. It goes without saying that it caused intense stir in the Telugu socio-political milieu.

This movement of Telugu novel towards modernity and social relevance was given comprehensiveness, depth and variety, during 1920—1940, by the efforts of Sri Viswanatha Satyanarayana, Adavi Bapiraju and Gudipati Venkatachalam. The historical novel, similarly was enriched by Sri Nori Narasimha Sastri who wrote absorbing novels based on the chequered history of Telugu *desa* usually centred round the career of great poets whose literary efforts added lustre to Telugu culture and remained significant landmarks in Telugu literature. Among these novels mention may be made of *Narayanu*

Bhattu, Rndrama Devi, Mallareddi, Kavi Sarvabhowmudu, Kavidvayam and *Dhurjati*. These four novelists brought to bear on the Telugu novel their distinct individual genius and enriched this genre with their invaluable creative endeavours.

In modern Telugu literature Sri Viswanatha Satyanarayana is a Himalayan figure. There is no literary genre which he has not touched and transformed and he managed to retain the indelible stamp of his individuality in all these forms. His overall world-view is articulated through his novels such as *Ekavira, Cheliyalikatta, Terachi Raju, Swarganiki Nicchenalu* and *Mababu.*

With his uncompromisingly modern and revolutionary ideas on life and art, Chalam virtually created a literary cyclone in Telugu cultural milieu. Social inequalities, particularly the plight of women in the rigid Hindu social structure, were the objects of his fictional critique in novels such as *Daiuamitchina Bharya, Amina, Vivaham* etc.

If Sri Viswanatha and Sri Chalam in their own ways represent the two complex polarities of tradition and modernity, Sri Adavi Bapiraju gives the impression of one who condescended to come down to the mundane level from empyrean heights of idyllic bliss. A versatile genius, at home in almost all the fine arts, he is a connoissuer with impeccable taste. He is a passionate lover of all that is glorious in Telugu tradition, and effectively depicted the patriotic fervour, courage artistic genius and taste of Telugu people in his novels su5h as *Gona Gannareddi, Himabindu,* and *Konangi.*

In addition to these figures, the novel was brought close the common readers by the efforts of popular and prolific writers such as Kovvali Lakshmi Narasimha Rao and Jampana Chandrasekhara Rao. Though their novels are usually derided simply as "railway literature", it cannot be doubted that they rendered significant service in popularizing the form of the novel. Similar is the case with the genre of crime fiction in Telugu which began taking a definite shape under the pioneering efforts of Sri Devaraju Venkata Krishna Rao, Sri Chaganti Seshayya,Venkata Parvatheswara Kavulu and others. While the novels of these writers were mostly adaptations or translations from Bengali and English, the credit of naturalizing and extending the popularity of crime fiction in Telugu belongs to original writers such as Somaraju Ramanuja Rao.

It was during the 1940's that the Telugu novel may be said to have reached a significant phase of development. In regard to themes, style and craft, far-reaching changes were brought about by Gopichand, Buchibabu G.V. Krishna Rao and Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastri. These novelists introduced several sophisticated trends in themes and techniques such as the stream of consciousness, psychoanalysis, existentialism etc.

With the attainment of independence, Telugu novel achieved a significant level of contemporary relevance. Numerous novels

began evidencing new techniques, thematic variety and mature level of craft. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that the quantum of Telugu novels published during the last twenty five years far exceeds the entire number published during the first seventy five years of its existence. These novels were mainly concerned with the depiction of socio-political changes and in this regard the work of Sri Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao, Sri Mahidhara Rama Mohan Rao; Sri Uppala Lakshmana Rao etc deserve particular mention. While Sri K. Kutumba Rao is noted for his realistic portrayal, Sri Rama Mohan Rao dealt with the upsurge against the feudal regime in Telangana and the socio-political changes in Andhra milieu after independence in his novels such as *Onamalu*, *Mrityuvu Nidallo*, *Kattula Vantena* and *Swayamvaranam*. A similar concern for the fate of the common man in contemporary society was depicted with uncommon skill by Sri "Sarada". His novels show unerring insight into contemporary problems and a fearless commitment to render them in all their complexity.

Among the younger generation, Balivada Kanta Rao, R.S. Sudershanam, Randhi Somaraju, Kommuri Venugopala Rao, Gollapudi Maruthi Rao, Singaraju Lingamurti and Icchapurapu Jagannadha Rao are particularly gifted in the portrayal of the anomalies of middle class life with felt sypmpathy as well as aesthetic detachment.

By 1950's, the novel consolidated its stature as the most popular form of literature (as such this age itself may be regarded as the age of the novel) and attracted the cleative talent of both men and women. Moreover the emergence of women novelists in significant numbers is one of the interesting featnres of post-Indepence Telugu fiction. The problems, both domestic and offlcial, faced by educated, working women and their impact on family life were portrayed with great subtlety and skill by P. Sridevi whose *Kalatita Vyaktulu* remains a memorable novel. Equally gifted are novelists such as Malati Chandur, Dwivedula Visalakshi, Muppala Ranganayakamma, Vasireddi Sita Devi, Parimala Someswar, and Anandaramam, All these show great familiarity with the form of the novel and depict with skill the problems, both familial and individual, faced by society in the throes of modernization. Similarly, other women novelists like Yaddanapudi Sulochanarani, Koduri Kousalya Devi, Marireddi Sulochana and Kavilipati Vijayalakshmi, while of unequal metrit, did contribute greatly towards making the novel the most popular literary form. Among these, hower, it is "Latha" who stands apart: an uncompromising modernist in outlook, she began as a popular chronicler of emotional frustrations, but quickly chalked out a distinct path for herself which attained its maturity in highly artistic pieces such as *Mohanavamsi*.

It is obvious, rom the above, that the conflict between traditional culture and the impinging modern outlook forms a significant area of concern for the Telugu novelist, as, indeed, for all creative writers in developing countries. Many Telugu novelists were concerned, therefore, with the

conflict between self and society, between assertion of individuality and the need for conformity. This theme has had two skilful exponents in Sri Polapragada Satyanarayanamurti and Sri Potukutchi Sambasiva Rao. Sri Polapragada is particularly gifted in evoking middle class milieu in coastal Andhra as evident in his novels *Sangham Chesina Manishi, Koushalya and Deepasikha*. Similarly, the predicament of the sensitive individual in a fiercely competitive society, guided by the stifling ideal of material success is ably depicted by Sri Sambasiva Rao in his novels such as *Udayakiranalu, Yedu Rojula Mazili and Anveshana*.

Among those who made pioneering efforts in regard to naturalizing the mode of language in fiction, Sri Poranki Dakshina Murti has a significant place. His uniqueness lies in skilfully using the dialects of the three Telugu regions (Andhra, Rayalaseema and Telengana) with effortless ease and elegance without the least trace of artificiality. While *Velugu-Vennala-Godari* uses the linguistic modes peculiar to Godavari region, *Mutyala Pandiri* skilfully employs Telugu of the Telengana region and similarly, *Rangavalli*, employs the Rayalaseema variations of Telugu language. Thus these novels form a linguistic trinity reflecting the diversities and yet asserting the fundamental unity behind.

Another extremely original writer is Sri Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastri. In emotional intensity, technical sophistication and, above all, linguistic originality he is the tallest of postwar Telugu novelists. While he has firm convictions regarding social and economic problems faced by contemporary society and is, from the political point of view, a "committed" writer, he never allows these to bedevil either his thematic range or his sense of fictional craft. As a result, while intensely suggestive, he is also eminently readable.

In regard to what one may call 'the experimental' novel, mention should be made of "Navin" whose *Ampasayya* is the most original piece of fiction by a young writer about the adolescents. "Navin" depicts in this novel the complexities and emotional upheavals of adolescent life, as they manifest themselves particularly in sophomores and their life in colleges and hostels. While the evoking of the milieu of college life in this novel has a freshness and spontaneity all its own, the novel is also a remarkable triumph in regard to the surrealistic technique it uses skilfully.

Equally interesting, from the technical point of view, is *Himajvala* by Vaddera Chandidas. As the title itself suggests, it is an 'experimental' novel and is concerned with the depiction of emotional conflict as a consequence of sexual problems. As such while the situations are common, the corresponding emotional implications are analyzed in an uncommon way with depth and intensity. The predominant features of modern life, painting, music, and poetry—all these colour the language of the novel and give it a peculiar pungency as well as its intense modernity.

The continuing predicament of the Harijans, in a catse dominated society, in spite of legislative measures, seems to be the thematic motif of another significant novel entitled *Naimisaranyam* by N. R. Nandi. It emphatically asserts the fact that in spite of the lapse of twenty seven years after the achievement of independence and the assertions of the Government regarding the avalability of basic freedoms to all sections of society, there has been no significant change in overall outlook towards these hapless sections of society which continue to be victims of deeprooted oppressive customs. Another equally significant novel is ***Pakudu Rallu*** by Ravuri Bharadwaja. With the fatally seductive charm of the tinsel splendour of the celluloid world and its underlying pathos as its theme, it is remarkable for its realistic characterization and racy narrative.

During the sixties, in addition to publishing houses, the writing of fiction has been given added eneouragement by the magazines, particularly weeklies whose prize competitions are an annual feature. This has undoubtedly led to the spotting of hidden talent and the trend invariably is to have one or two "serials" is almost all magazines.

Telugu fiction has recently attained an extremely significant feather in its cap. This is the writing of *Dharma Nirnayam* by Sri Tummalapalli Ramalingeswara Rao. Though in its ultimate thematic implications it is firmly anchored to metaphysical and spiritual problems, it is without any doubt one of the greatest "social" novels of our time in Telugu. Contemporary social problems as they impinge on the fate of individual lives are very ably depicted in this novel. Thus in several ways it is an outstanding work of art. Idealistic love, without the slightest tinge of carnality, articulated in chaste prose allied with an unerring eye for dramatic suspense, gives this novel its unique significance. Sri Rao also wrote a historical novel entitled *Tikkana Somayaji* equally remarkable for its high sense of the craft of story-telling.

In retrospect, Telugu novel presents a varied picture. Ever since the inception of the genre in Telugu literature, more than ten thousand novels, at a conservative estimate, have seen the light of day. The first twenty five years of the history of the Telugu novel were dominated by translations, adaptations and the historical genre. The next twenty five years registered the far ranging impact of the independence movement which only reflected the underlying need for social and political changes for national regeneration. After the attainment of independence, Telugu novel acquired technical maturity in addition to its intrinsic social relevance. Novels such as *Asamarthuni Jeevayatra. Chivaraku Migiledi, Chaduvu* and *Keelu Bommalu* reflected in their own diverse ways, the problems-both social and individual, confronting contemporary man as a conseqnence of the socio-political

changes wrought by the two world wars. While the Telugu novel still continues to be close to the family and its problems, this has not in any significant way constricted its thematic variety or technical experimentation which all along held the closest attention of the Telugu novelist.

(Rendered into English from original Telugu by Dr. M. Sivaramkrishna)

Telugu Novel Vis-a-Vis

The World Literary Scene

Adapa Ramakrishna Rao

Though long naratives and prose romances have been in existence in Telugu for a few centuries; the novel as well-defined literary form emerged only a hundred years ago, and it was the result then, as in other Indian languages, of the impact of the newly introduced English education on the Indian youth of the day. While in other literary forms, especially in poetry and drama, Telugu literature can boast of a long and distinct native tradition and the indigenous and alien strains may be clearly detected in Telugu poetry even to this day, the novel, undoubtedly, was a gift from the West, and so Telugu novelists have all along been endeavouring to keep pace with their Western counterparts in technical innovations and philosophical preoccupations.

Telugu Writers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries understandably had for their models the popular novels of Goldsmith, Swift, and Scott. Like the English writers they too used their novels to expose the social evils of contemporary society or to rouse the patriotic fervour of their readers. Gandhian movement in the Twenties added a new demension to the spirit and content of the novel, and it was further enriched by the impact of Marxsim. Gandhian thought. with its ready approval of the principle of bread labour derived from Ruskin, Tolstoi and ultimately from the writings of the Russian peasant Bondaref, its declaration that the objective of *Swaraj* is not the greatest good of the greatest number but *Sorvodaya*—the equal development of all citizens, its condemnation of economic exploitation of any kind, and its uncompromising opposition to colonialism, paved the way, at it were, for the move towards Marxism. The impact of Marxist-Leninist thought can be seen in two kinds of works in Telugu fiction: in the fictional accounts of the working class movements against the existing social order, and in the stories and novels that pay attention to the economic and other forces responsible for the problems faced by the people in our society,

Freud and Jung, with their probings into the innermost recesses of the human mind, started attracting the attention of the Telugu novelist soon and the psychological novel made its appearance on the literary scene. It was fortunate that the Telugu novelists who tried their hand at this *genre* were great craftsmen: their works find a place of honour among the outstanding literary works in Telugu. The influence of D.H. Lawrence too can be seen in a handful of forcefully written social novels of this period.

It was in the Forties that Bengali novels, Saratchandra Chatterjee's works in particular, began to apper in translation in Telugu, and he more

than any other writer, has captured the hearts of the Telugu readers. As a result, the Telugu novel inevitably came under his way If the well-meaning but impractical young hero and the loving and long-suffering heroine continue to dominate Telugu novel even today, this is undoubtedly due to the influence of Saratchandra, who has at once been a blessing and a bane to Telugu fiction.

The dream of building a great nation after achieving political Independence, where one can hold his head high and where the world is not broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls, has gradually given place to disenchantment, and the contemporary Telugu novel captures this mood of disillusionment and disguest quite vividly. The novel has once again become a vehicle for vehement social protest.

The rise of pulp magazines in the Sixties which vie with each other in serialising novels has resulted in quantitative increase in Telugu novels but at the cost of quality. If there is less concern today for craftsmanship and philosophical view-point in Telugu fiction, it must be attributed at least in part to the demands made on the resources of writers by the commercial press.

Not that the conscientious craftsman have altogether disappeared from the scene in the post-Independence period. The emergence of the regional and naturalistic novels, and the employment of stream-of-consciousness technique must be noted in this context, and so should the attempts to present contemporary Indian life from an existentialist view-point recognised. These experiments are not always aesthetically satisfying however, though the motive and the attempt are commendable, and one is invariably reminded of Saintsbury's warning that in art "technique will be of little use to you and of no little danger." The deliberate employment of technical devices and superimposition of philosophical view-point have some times resulted in awkward self-conscious writing and still-born character.

In his reflections on "The Furture of Fiction" one of the foremost novelists of America today, Saul Bellow, refers to the apprehensions of litterateurs that the novel has only a past and no future, and that the great novelists of the Twentieth Century-Proust, Joyce, Mann, and Kafka—have created sterile masterpieces, and that with them we have come to the end of the line, though he himself does not endorse the pessimistic observation. One may safely assert that Telugu novel at any rate has not yet come to the end of the line as it has a long way to traverse before it can exhaust its creative potentialities.

...the novel is "a perpetual quest for reality, the field of its research being always the social world, the material of its analysis being always manners as the indication of the direction of man's soul"

—LIONEL TRILLING

"The only reason for the existence of a novel is that is does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt, the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass.

... ...

A novel is in its broadest definition a personal, a direct impression of life: that, to begin with, constitutes its value, which is greater or less according to the intensity of of the impression. But there will be no intensity at all, and therefore no value, unless there is freedom to feel and say."

—HENRY JAMES

"It is with fiction as with religion. It should present another world, but one to which we feel the tie."

—HERMAN MELVILLE

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Tripuraneni Gopichand

ASAMARTHUNI JEEVAYATRA

[THE TALE OF A SIMPLETON'S LIFE]

Introduced by : **Dr. M. Sivaramakrishna**

About the Novel :

Theme : the dreams and eventual disenchantment of an indecisive self in conflict with society.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : any average town in Andhra, 1940's.

Principal Characters :

SITARAMA RAO : the protagonist.

INDIRA : his wife.

RAMAYYA : the confidant of Sitarama Rao and his friend, philosopher and guide.

Year of Publication : 1945.

Editorial Note :

TRIPURANENI GOPICHAND (1910-1962) is undoubtedly one of the seminal figures in the development of the Telugu novel. A man of great versatility, Gopichand's creativity encompassed many genres : he was not only an outstanding novelist and short-story writer but also one of the very few Telugu literateurs to make significant use of

the amedium of the film. He is mong the most accomplished Telugu novelists for whom novel writing is nothing less than a philosophic—almost a mystical — quest. In its overall attitude, Gopichand's fictional art represents the quest for an integral view of life. While he began as an uncompromising rationalist, he was quick to discover—and honestly admit—the futility of rationality. This led him to restructure his perspective on life—due mainly to the impact of Sri Aurobindo's integral humanism—and in his later fiction Gopichand stressed the significance of the metaphysical and mystical as against the purely empirical attitude to life. Gopichand is, however, an absorbing story-teller and the art of the novel is never subordinated to philosophic enquiry. Consequently, his fiction achieves a rare blending of utmost readability with deep reflection. In his technique also, he maintains his distinction; he may be regarded as almost the innovator of the genre of the psychological novel in Telugu fiction. In this regard he anticipates novelists such as Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastry and Balivada Kantha Rao. In regard to style, Gopichand's language is chaste, supple and lucid with great restraint and economy in expression. His writings include brilliant essays (Postu Cheyyani Uttaralu), *short stories* (Desam Emayyetattu *etc.*) *and plays* (Abhagini *etc.*).

ASAMARTHUNI JEEVAYATRA anticipates a theme which was to engage the talent of a number of later Telugu novelists: the sense of "life being a cheat," its ultimate reward found only in a philosophic resignation to both failure and success. The protagonist, Sitaramarao, is portrayed by Gopichand as the converging point of the dichotomy not only between tradition and modernity but also between reason and emotion, between intellect and impulse. Sitaramarao drastically reduces the complexity of life to rationality ignoring the fact that reason alone is incapable of explaining the intricate nature of personal and social relations. Therefore, what confers distinction on his personality—his intellectual probing—ultimately and ironically becomes the source of the disintegration of his character. The novel thus becomes an ironic-yet intensely moving study in the dissolution of a personality through an overdeveloped intellect which eventually dries up all emotions.

Synopsis :

Sitaramarao, like his father, is quite concerned with the perpetuation of his family prestige. He believes that prestige is the be-all and end-all of man's existence. After the death of his father, he decides to lead a simple and straightforward life, without quarrels or any social or domestic turmoil. He just wants to be good, and do good to all, thus satisfying everybody including his ego, as best as he can. But in the heart of hearts he feels smug in regard to his attitude towards society which, he naively expects, ought to be grateful to him for all that he does to its members. Ramayya warns him against his complacent view of men and women around him ; but in vain. Sitaramarao, anxious to make his uncle feel eternally obliged to him, virtually writes off his uncle's heavy debt to him of about Rs. 40,000/- accepting in lieu of it, ten acres of worthless land. His uncle, a worldly-wise man, applied the flattering unction of family prestige to his nephew and gets his work done.

Sitaramarao used to be an idealist in his younger days. Now, because of his own "split personality", he finds it extremely difficult to abide by his own decisions. To his mind, all knowledge seems to be conflicting in character. He, therefore, promptly comes to the conclusion that he should stop working. Work or no work, time always elapses. Life seems to be full of avoidable sound and fury, signifying nothing. It appears to be quite futile to search for a meaning in the impersonal, unfeeling and mechanically moving universe. It does continue to exist, irrespective of what man does or does not. Even society seems to be apathetic towards an individual's pursuit of knowledge. Sometimes the attempt even boomerangs on the individual because he is not immune to social evil. Ignorance is bliss in a society that frowns upon knowledge. The struggle for existence is equally senseless because death is inevitable and inescapable. Life is an intermission between two unknown and unknowable conditions of death. If death is the ultimate reality, human happiness or the lack of it is inconsequential. In fact, man can never be sure that he is happier than an animal. Thus Sitaramarao's introvert brooding drives him to mental anarchy and philosophic nihilism. He wrecks his marriage by ending up as a perverse wife-beater. All his love

for Indira becomes poisoned owing to his incompetence, "do-nothingness" and false knowledge. Hard pressed for money, he writes an arrogant and accusing letter to his uncle charging him with ingratitude. His uncle's reply shocks him into realizing that he is no better than his father whose family pride ultimately caused the premature death of Sitaramarao's mother. He also learns that his wife, Indira, has been highly noble, sympathetic and understanding in her relations with him. His daughter - a mere slip of a girl - is mortally afraid of him mainly because of his violent moods. All this knowledge in fact aggravates his fast deteriorating condition. He becomes a schizophrenic and violently crazy about moral values in social life. He apparently forgets the mess of his own private life and wanders in the streets crying down the social hypocrisy and corruption. Presently he attends a public meeting where all the speakers, without exception, happen to be corrupt in one way or another. Sitaramarao springs a surprise on them by disclosing in public the scandalous background of the so-called social leaders. The mob, however, turns violent against him when it is informed by Ramayya that Sitaramarao himself is a sadistic wife-beater. A little later in the evening Ramayya and Sitaramarao sit quietly near the funeral ground and discuss the latter's problem at length. Ramayya explains in detail the theory of evolution of the biological species, emphasising the need of an organism to adjust to its environment in the interest of its own survival. As for the gap in social and individual ethics, the individual should strike a balance between the two extremes. Negativism, anarchy and nihilistic attitudes lead him nowhere.

But having already reached a point of no return psychologically, Sitaramarao spends the night all alone in the funeral ground, absorbed in deep observation of the burning corpses and rapt in an intense introspection. The morning discovers him dead in the funeral ground.

Essay :

Gopichand's *Asamarthuni Jeevayatra* constitutes a significant landmark in the growth of the Telugu novel towards thematic contemporaneity and structural sophistication. This fact, however, has been uncritically assumed rather than analyzed with relevant care for its implications. The result, therefore, has been by and large, the substitution of explanation for evaluation and cliches for critical canons in determining the significance of the novel. This has led to the inevitable, though avoidable, insistence on the content of the novel rather than on the pervasive, generic nature of its aesthetic achievement.

Part of this achievement stems, obviously, from the fact that it marks the beginning of the author's own spiritual odyssey in quest of an enduring faith. The temptation, therefore to regard the novel as the record of a personal predicament, fictionally disguised and projected through the protagonist, is almost irresistible. It is this almost fatal identification of the man with the artist which has resulted in overlooking the finesse which Gopichand shows in transforming what is essentially a personal dilemma into a universally valid quest for a meaningful self.

This transcendence of the regional and the limitingly personal core becomes meaningful if the spectrum of influences which conditioned Gopichand's perspective as a novelist is analyzed. To begin with, like the other novelists of his generation Gopichand also was aware of the muted but felt conflict between tradition and modernity increasingly becoming apparent in diverse fields of Indian life and society. There were many Telugu novelists who dealt with this confrontation : *Veyipadagalu* (1934) and *Narayana Rao* (1934) by Viswanatha Satyanarayana and Adavi Bapiraju, respectively, were apparently documenting, in their own dissimilar ways, the transition of Indian society from a predominantly conservative *ethos* to an increasingly secular, humanisistic one. The basic stance of these novelists, however, seems to be one of nostalgia—for the idyllic simplicity of a romantically glorified social and spiritual past. The protagonists—Dharmarao and Narayanarao—seem, to be sure, more aware of the conflict (between tradition and modernity) than most characters

in the novel, but they hardly choose—or are capable of choosing-a firm, clearly defined faith. This is because for them the confronation between the Indian *milieu* with its cumulative social and economic inequalities and the modern secular temper, though percolating to the roots, is merely a transitory phenomenon capable of eventual resolution. The corner stone of this resolution for both Viswanatha and Adavi is their unilateral, irrevocable faith in the viability of Indian tradition (with, of course, some minor adjustments). The very name of the hero in Viswanatha's *Veyi Padagalu*—Dharmarao—draws attention to the fact that the novelistic design is a very thinly disguised cover for a moralistic fable in which "characters *mean* before they *are*".

If nostalgia is the predominant mood of Viswanatha and Adavi, Gopichand's basic stance is rooted in protest. The diverse influences which moulded his intellectual perspective—and by implication, his ultimate concern as a creative writer—deepened and intensified his innate inability to accept anything without rational conviction. Son of one of the most uncompromising rationalists of Andhra (Sri Tripuraneni Ramaswami Chaudhuri), Gopichand's rationality is partly explicable in terms of parental influence. The seeds of pragmatism and rational enquiry, however, were nurtured by Gopichand with the fertilizing waters drawn from radical humanists both western and Indian, such as Bertrand Russell and M.N. Roy. If these writers made Gopichand aware of the irrationality of many Indian traditions fossilized and perpetuated meaninglessly, Marxian dialectic gave him an insight into socio-economic imbalances. In short, while his father and the intellectual *milieu* of the times reinforced his innate conviction regarding rationality as an indispensable article of any valid perspective of life, Marxian philosophy taught him the need for social and economic justice based on the eventual liquidation of all 'bourgeois' traditions.

But Gopichand was much too honest a seeker—and an artist with unimpeachable aesthetic integrity—to regard these doctrines as the sole solutions to man's social and spiritual impasse : a naivete which marred many of his father's otherwise impeccable intentions as man and writer. As evidenced by the overall perspective behind the entire corpus of his writing,

Gopichand was concerned primarily with the problem of evolving a pragmatic equation of life which is able to reconcile the felt need for rationality and the compulsive urges of one's moral and spiritual intuitions. Consequently, Gopichand's novels are all united thematically by the pervasive quest for a meaningful faith, for, in short, an integral self which is rooted as much in rationality as in the ethical and spiritual postulates. Though Gopichand was able to resolve this for himself by his later-day "conversion" to Sri Aurobindo's integral humanism, the initial stages of this quest were fraught with incredible moods of almost total nihilism and existential despair.

From this perspective, *Asamarthuni Jeevayatra* represents a predictable stage in the evolution of Gopichand's art. But the predicament of the protagonist—Sitaramarao—is by no means capable of being identified totally with the author's personal one. For he is not a stuffed figure animated by the author's personal crisis of faith and the resulting despair, but a live character symbolizing a spiritual mood and a social period with recognizable distinctions.

The world of Sitaramarao is one of tangible concretions though he himself has a penchant for fantasies and inane abstractions. On the narrative level, the novel is concerned with the life of an average, middle class Andhra youth. The hero-Sitaramarao-is the son of a fairly affluent family from which he inherits its inherent weaknesses as well : care for family traditions even at the risk of making one's life miserable is joined in Sitaramarao with awareness of their futility ; similary, to a certain extent he also shares an almost obsessive concern to maintain a facade of superiority to other people. And as the affluence slips away the need for maintaining the facade becomes accordingly acute.

The components of Sitaramarao's psyche are thus determined, to a certain extent, by the burden of familial tradition which he inherits. But there is also a touch of the narcissist in him : he has an almost neurotic obsession to project himself as a man of admitted superiority to all his relations and friends. This built-in craving for some sort of personal uniqueness is

further complicated by his naivete and innocence—at least in the initial stages of his tragic life. In fact, it is this romantic innocence which functions, to a certain extent, as the source of what is certainly a basic feature of his self: an overfertile imagination wrestling with, sometimes, only imaginary wrongs. Given an intrinsically imaginative temperament with an understandable craving to establish its identity (in a kinship-dominated society virtually unfamiliar with the atomisation of the West) it is only inevitable that the thematic implications of the novel should be concerned with the obsessive dreams of the protagonist and their progressive disenchantment culminating in his eventual crack-up.

The structure of the novel, correspondingly, is concerned with the depiction of Sitaramarao's disillusionment on diverse fronts representing the different layers of the tradition he has inherited. Gopichand thus makes Sitaramarao the structural nucleus and he is the centripetal core on which all the related characters coverage. The different sections of the novel are structurally designed to expose the hero to cruel, but necessary, disillusion in regard to his relations with his insistent, though inarticulate, longings and obsessions. On all these levels, Sitaramarao's innate stance of apparent innocence is ranged against the external *milieu* over which he has only remote control. His conception of love, for instance, is essentially romantic with the inevitable corollary of being very fragile against reality. When he courts his prospective wife, he is all tenderness and concern; he vehemently articulates his intention (which alas!, remains merely an intention) to make their marriage "different" from the ordinary rut. But it quickly follows the predictable pattern of disenchantment and his wife becomes intolerable to Sitaramarao: plain and almost inhumanly patient. In her Sitaramarao sees his own failure reflected unmistakeably. Against this harsh reality he has only one compensating mechanism: to escape into the world of near infantile fantasies.

From this point of view, the novel does succeed in cleverly juxtaposing the hero's fantasies and the impinging realities which spell disaster to these fantasies. In juxtaposing the interior consciousness of his hero with the different dimensions of reality

(represented by his wife, his uncle and the family traditions) Gopichand shows remarkable familiarity with the *genre* of the psychological novel. But nowhere does he neglect the primary concern of the novelist : to present a world of recognizable reality embodied in tangible, concrete characters. A cross-section of sharply individualised characters prevents the novel from deteriorating into fantasies and annoying abstractions. Sitaramarao's wife and uncle, for instance, are drawn with an unerring insight into human nature. The uncle, particularly, is one of the most significant characters in the novel. Shrewd but patient, cautious and calculating, yet human and generous, he in fact sets in motion the relentless process of self-acrutiny through which Sitaramarao goes. He makes him aware of the gap between one's idealised conception of life and the existential reality : an awareness which, ironically, makes Sitaramarao crack-up.

The relation between Sitaramarao and his uncle illumines, in fact, the dichotomy between the attitudes which they represent. While his uncle desires to educate Sitaramarao in the 'art of life', the latter finds life itself ridiculous. Therefore, his predicament is not explicable merely in terms of the desire for what one can call a ("statistically") normal life. As Gopichand portrays him, Sitaramarao is not so much incompetent as a confused character. He is in search of his own moorings which he fondly hopes would prevent him from helplessly drifting into the shoals of meaningless despair. He *is* capable of acting, but his *will* is atrophied since he inhabits a *milieu* in which even the best lack all conviction.

It is this absence of meaningful, operative convictions which explain Sitaramarao's drift into the nightmarish world of despair. This despair is so totally nihilistic that there is only one exit : suicide. Though this exit might look melodramatic and hardly convincing to many readers of the novel, one cannot but be

struck by the intensity and depth of felt, not imagined, despair which Sitaramarao represents. It is this despair which links him to the enduring tradition of the novel : the tradition of coming to grips with the problem of appearance and reality in and through characters representing the essential human emotions of triumph and despair. To the extent that it reflects the contemporary oscillation between awareness of a meaningful, integral life and the despairing incapacity to make this a reality, *Asamarthuni Jeevayatra* remains a signal—almost a seminal—triumph in the history of the Telugu novel.

*

Gudipati Venkata-chalam

BRAHMANEEKAM

(BRAHMINISM)

Introduced by : **Vegunta Mohan Prasad**

About the Novel :

Theme : A novel of ideas, portraying the complex traditions of Brahmins and their stifling impact on the individual.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : Vijayawada, 1930'.

Principal Characters :

SUNDARAMMA : the protagonist; the darkest and the most pathetic character of all the novels of Chalam.

THE YOUNG SANSKRIT SCHOLAR : her first husband, to whom she belongs always. Ordains her to remain a no man's land and 'no man's gland'. Dies.

CHANDRASEKHARAM : a rapscallion and a sadist. A callous and crafty second husband and seducer of Sundaramma.

RAMAYYA NAYUDU : rapes Sundaramma, yet a man of clear conscience.

CHILD : symbol of death and decay; also sin, revenge and casteism.

Year of Publication : 1937.

Editorial Note :

CHALAM (b. 1894) — or to be more precise Gudipati Venkatachalam— has all along been the stormy petrel *of contemporary Telugu literature. An uncompromising enemy of all constricting social traditions and customs, Chalam's uninhibited and daringly modern attitude to life brought a breath of fresh air into the stifling, decadent ethos of Telugu fiction. This is particularly evident in his extremely candid portrayal of sexual relations. Like D. H. Lawrence, Chalam is the prophet of the "religion of blood," of sex itself as a mode of knowledge and perception. Consequently, he brings to the theme of love a finesse and subtlety remarkably free from all vestiges of obscenity and vulgarity. Chalam finds in woman the* raison de tre *of existence and there are very few in Telugu fiction who have created a more memorable gallery of women characters with the same tenderness and understanding as Chalam. Above all, he is a prolific, versatile artist ranging with equal skill in the fields of short-story, drama and essay. His writings include* Chitrangi, Sasi Rekha, Maidanam, Hampi Kanyalu, O Puvvu Pusindi and Musings. *Chalam's prose is inimitable - limpid, evocative yet intensely, compulsively readable. His latter-day conversion to the path of mysticism—he eventually settled down at Sri Ramana Maharshi's* Ashram *at Tiruvannamalai—is entirely in keeping with his usual 'shock' tactics.*

Brahmaneekam *is a milestone in the evolution of the Telugu novel towards thematic contemporaneity. Chalam makes Sundaramma not only a representative of decadent Brahminism but also the object of his relentless social critique. Thus, the novel may be regarded as among the earliest to make Telugu fiction socially relevant. As such it is not only the pathetic story of a helpless Brahmin widow but also a fervent plea for the assertion of feminist freedom.*

Synopsis :

Sundaramma is a village Brahmin belle. She is born in a family which is an island to itself. She is a frog in an unused well, has not crossed the threshold of her house even after her child marriage to a young Sanskrit scholar. She is married to him at the age of eight, and the marriage is consummated at fourteen. The boy is very erotic with all his Sanskrit knowledge of *sringara* but soon swoons to death, making a pillow of his fair wife's ripening breast. He dies of the fine excess of romanticism which is a disease with him. Life becomes a living death to his forlorn widow. For a fleeting two years the couple have bolted themselves inside and there has been no such thing as time for them. But that is no more.

Sundaramma is worthy of her name but she is mentally a bundle of dirty linen. She does not outgrow her ancestral demoniacal spirituality. Her response to life is quite conditioned and her imagination springs from a closed structure of the Brahmin caste. She believes in a multitude of ghosts and gods. She claims unbroken heritage from the weekly visitations of her familial departed souls. She performs all types of nauseating ablutions to please the other crude and rude voices and stifles her own inner voice. She is thus lost both in time and space of the past. She has neither present nor future. Time to her is not a continuum. Her psyche is at the mercy of the allc ommanding and demanding mytho-caste-creed querulousness. Faith to her is her only reason. The only saving grace in her character is human pity. Her breast is filled with the milk of human kindness which is itself a tragic flaw. Married at the not so concupiscent age of eight, she suffers a concussion when her unpromising husband dies while she is only sixteen. At the last request of her dying husband she remains unshaven, retains her plait, the present painful, symbolic remainder of past glory. She begins mixing memory with desire.

She is yet a languishing lost-heart until her father too needlessly dies and she is found under the care of her maternal uncle Venkata Ramayya. Under the same roof finds shelter a poor, but a boorish music tutor Chandrasekharam, an orphan. He gives an excuse of music lessons to Venkata Ramayya's

daughter and gets his sustenance. Sundaramma much against her wish is soon led to take music to her already broken heart. He tends sedulous. She remains indifferent. He pretends ill. She nurses him out of pity. He pleads mercy. He is a beggar at the inner shrine of her body. He is reproached, but with mercy, human kindness, forgiving and pity. He takes advantage of her supple mind and picks up courage and in a devil--dare--way rapes her one night; probably in her non-violent non co-operative posture and mood.

This is quite an enigmatic rape scene every skilfully handled by the author. Probably Sundaramma could no more protest in her ennui. Rape is her last hope anyway.

His nightly calls on her become more self-assumed and sadistic. To her of course, every time it is a tense struggle between meek protest and silent surrender. She is obsessed with the burden of sin just as with the swelling of the abdomen which becomes a news to all and sundry sooner or later.

Venkata Ramayya, as a devou reformer, feels it his bounden duty to perform marriage. He brings back the hit and run man after a great deal of persuasion and coaxing. Chandra-sekharam, the orphan, feels self important now and agrees to marry his own spoil. He is all too happy not at the legalisation of an already committed crime through marriage but at the bonus of a twenty-five-rupee Bank clerk job that the marriage fetches him.

The upstart husband poses a saviour now, adding fuel to fire. Sundaramma is doubly disgraced. She hates him. He is jealous and suspicious of her fidelity. He is worried of her beauty, the beauty of a wife. He becomes a crank and takes to cards. Her woes are enhanced with the beastly interrogations by her newly earned gambler-husband. She still listens to the voice of her first husband. He is like the ever swelling corpse in Ionesco's play *Amede or How to Get Rid of It*. Is not widow marriage a blasphemy ? !

And then the baby arrives, unwelcome. She is already a slave to her wife-beater. A rag that she is, she finds no money to

look after the needs of the ever crying baby. Though the baby is an evil fruit she is much attached to it. She is full with the maternal instinct. Her milk of human kindness is already spilled on the dreary desert sands of an unloving husband. There is no more supply of milk for the baby. The monstrous fact is that Chandrasekharam sucks her breasts and feeds himself and is entirely pleased with himself. With a hope to get a few rupees she offers herself for intercourse and during lovemaking picks up courage to ask money. He promises half-heartedly and next morning she is duped.

Nothing is known of Sundaramma's mother at this crisis. Why : Even the Supreme Mother is indifferent to her helplessness. A rape by a Brahmin priest is attempted on her when once she goes to the temple to pray for the longevity of her child.

Everywhere there is that sickly, agonising and piercing cry of the pale, emaciated and hungry baby. It is almost a deafening existentialist cry, 'I cry, therefore I exist !' Neighbours do not take any human interest. God knows where the husband is !

The palsied mother leaves the child at home to cry and is soon on the streets. She beckons a physician. He examines the child. She has no money to buy the injectible medicine. He takes her for a mad cap and leaves her to her fate. She is on the hectic streets once more in her frenzy. The drug stores are full with medicines but the drugs are for sale. A newly rich man of a low caste *gamalla* seated in the medical shop could not resist her seductive looks. The wolf follows her home passing for a doctor and offers help. The woman in distress believes him.

He asks her caste. She says she is a Brahmin. That is quite a kick to him and he is spirited, gives a guffaw and asks for the querdon of her body in return for his help as a physician. She is shocked to death saying "Me!", but succumbs. When the rapacious man discloses his identity she swoons down on a burning lamp nearby and burns out in righteous wrath. The man too is burnt down in her flames, the flames licking his loins. That is quite a conflagration. The baby too is left dying. The one word uttered by Sundaramma that she was a Brahmin with a possible emphatic generic consciousness of pride and ego is also burnt down.

Death is thus complete and a vengeful fulfilment.

Essay :

This novel of Chalam can be called a miracle novel. Its protracted argument is not in consonance with its hasty conclusion. Through language Chalam gives a deep hurt to the Brahmin caste although his hatred towards it is only intellectual and not an emotional one. He is not quite sure whether it is the individual will or the prior consciousness of a generic caste that ordains the end. At a time when the novelist has to come out boldly Chalam merely shows an unfeeling attitude; he needlessly slips back into long winded arguments and self-introspection as in

> "We ! we are Brahmins !"
>
> That one word, was it absolutely necessary that she should have uttered it ? Had it been inevitable in the history of the world ? Was it preordained in the very creation or was it, whoever knows it due to the cause and effect of the past lives of Sundaramma and Ramayya ? Or did the angels divine it so just as I only at this point decided to end this story with this stroke ?" (p. 78).

One is unconsciously reminded of the old man Stan Parker in the all forgiving Patrick White's novel '*The Tree of Man* or the bereaved father Father Vincent in the sublime Allan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*. One wishes Chalam also was as resigned as them both and or atleast had given a straightened answer to the so-called class conflicts. In this novel one vainly searches for a nativity which is real and convincing. Unlike other novels of Chalam, the characters here are painted figures. They are conceived but not convincing. The basic material response which is an undercurrent in this novel is quite genuine and always attains to the level of poetry. Unfortunately it does not happen to be the main theme.

Brahmaneekam is a novel written deliberately to strike at the root causes of social maladjustments but not psychological ones. Realism is sacrificed for the sake of idealism. Sundaramma is not a rebel like Chalam's other women characters, Rajeswari, Padmavathi, Lalasa or Aruna who are surrealistic revolutionaries with a consciousness, a *chaitanya* and cheer. They are seekers and

harbingers of the women's Lib. Sundaramma is just a stoic and a cynic. She is a slave girl dependent on the dictates of a dead husband, and the commands of a sadist, for a second husband. She has neither education to boast of nor economic freedom. She is no better than a child who cries for milk and she is such a kind of mother who boils the child and not milk if the child cried for milk.

Chalam did not aim at total liberation of woman. It is he who writes : "The woman too has a body : it needs exercise; she has a brain—it needs knowledge; she has a heart—it needs experience." But it is not only woman but man also who needs to be freed from the clutches of the oppressive rich, from the shackles of the existing socio-economic scene. Woman's liberation is coupled with eradication of all types of exploitation. A free woman until such time remains an utopian and hedonistic idea.

The dynamics of plot is self-enclosed. The novel's inner structure of imagery is part of the internal necessity of the novelist who may be anything but a literary sociologist. *Brahmaneekam,* to be fair, is a study of the place of woman in society but not quite an objective study. The social institutions and social processes are there but they do not bear the stamp of authenticity and immediacy. They do not share a conspectus. The sense of inevitability is missing in the novel. Sundaramma's father needlessly dies and her mother's whereabouts are not known. Sundaramma stands an odd comparison with Savitri in R.K. Narayan's dark novel. *The Dark Room* She is as much an utter fool as Lakshmi in *Sakharam Binder.* I am right now reminded of a lady in Ranganayakamma's novel *Bali Peetham* wherein the heroine-wife does not have half-an-anna to drink soda.

There are three strains in the novel : 1. Religious, 2. Economic exploitation, 3. A snapping of familial bonds. These three strains without rhythm are represented by Sundaramma, Ramayya and Chandrasekharam respectively.

Does Chalam intend a cataclysmical change in the social set up is another question many people fight shy to answer.

Sundaramma herself has no desire to change the set up. She is a helpless prisoner of past. Perhaps the novel relates more to the psychological conditions and psychological history of the author than an objective study of caste.

There are no documentary evidences in the novel. No dates, no political events. It is not a mirror to the times. It is not a criticism of life. The author does not bother to reeord the sweeping changes that came aceross society owing to the popular reformation of widow marriage and literacy programmes done by the shaping genius of Veeresalingam Panthulu. If at all we see any such reflection elsewhere in the works of Chalam it is only as a mild ridicule and a laughing in the sleeves. It is positively a negative impression. The imaginary characters in this novel only broadly relate to the historical climate of the age which is a slow renaissance. Chalam has perhaps failed to transform his private equation of themes to social equations. Characters in this novel are set to motion within contrived situations and tortured lanes of rape to seek the private destiny and meaning of Chalam.

The structure of feeling that we derive is a bit removed from the core of meaning of the novel. Thus it becomes a novel of ideas, intention and of a certain insufficiency. Sundaramma's extreme personal insecurity is so deeply devastating that it tends to become a myth and her pathetic end a miracle. She suffers from lack of love and identity. She has fear of starvation but not stagnation. She is essentially an isolated individual, dominated by fear of an apprehensive view of life. She is never an optimist. She shows no response to experience.

Brahmaneekam however is a study of society in crisis and of hope for the better. It concludes—

> This is the last miracle of Brahminism which ended with Sundaramma in the Kali Yuga. (p. 84).

Chalam the founder of free floating intelligensia has his own doubts when he writes :

> Ramayya's past history is responsible for it—his ancestor's dead history. These trifles-all at once, at one place

at one centre, crossing one another and meeting one another puzzle and madden the philosophers and scientists who endeavour to unravel the mystery of the world. May be-action, fate, heredity, chance, coincidence, history, forces of creation and the very will of God—though seemingly various are one indeed. (p. 78).]

This passage serves well as an internal evidence to the muddied up and confused social response of the novelist who helplessly philosophizes the theme because he has no concrete solution to offer:

"His anger for Brahmins is not only intellectual but emotional. He is a poor creature of the times," (p. 79), is a pointer to the tension in the novel between the *a priori* intent of the novelist and the truthful portrayal of reality. The novelist's imagination seemingly encourages his ideological illusions. Chalam here presents a partial rather than a total view, not a world view, not a global vision anyhow, but a particular idiosyncratic and private, conditioned view. To support my argument, I quote from the novel:

> His ambition is to enjoy a Brahmin woman. He does not know why. Psychologists may come out saying that he was probably insulted by a Brahmin virgin he once loved as a boy in his Brahmin Master's house. Perhaps he loved her, respected and adored her. (p. 79)

The character delineation of Ramayya Nayudu it quite surprising if not convincing. It is not a reflected sorrow but a genuine terror that is found in the traumatic shock received by Sundaramma. It is a hurt in the heart, nameless wound caused by a needless injury.

" I want you"

" Me !"

Did any God listen to that cry 'me', that wonderment, that splitting doubt ? Did He have ears to hear ? Did He listen to that shierk of the mother looking down at the child

left on the floor dying? How many countless hapless women wives and virgins shouted that helpless 'me' before those invisible beasts who plundered their human treasures of piety!" (p. 81).

Well, this does not sound an argument and this is the saving beauty of the novel which otherwise is a novel of proposition. The proposition is that prostitution which is an institution is domesticated even in the highest caste. The novelist satirises it with such a vehemence and gusto that too often he adopted the first person singular in the novel and interferes with the free flow of the naturalistic novel.

The total impression one gets from the reading of the novel is that Chalam fails to unite dissimilars to reveal a pattern out of a mass and a mess. The literary consciousness of Chalam is present but society as a literary witness is missing. This does not however mean that the novel is all that unworthy of Chalam. It just happens to be an artistic failure. There is nothing to improve upon it. One should take it with a pinch of salt if not with a ton of salt. Brahmaeekam shows the artistory of Chalam but not his art.

Like Herman Hesse Chalam's political faith has always been that of a democrat and his world outlook that of an individualist. He is a very personal writer, always a spiritual recluse. He is an eagle and his readers are little sparrows. Like Hemingway he has gone far out into the sea where none could be of any help to him nor could he be out of danger. The sheer poetic rapture of his diction and style can never be transfused in English. His writings must be understood with nerves because they are written with them. They melt like a cake of ice on a hot pan and there is a sudden freeze of recognition of the something which we forgot to remember.

The hurricane that he was once is now a hurricane lamp a little spiritual light content to look inwards and bent upon looking the innermost. Perhaps an Arthur Koestler can explain him or the other compeers Maugham and Huxley. He may not need the Telugu land but it needs him. At the worst, his writings become a historical necessity as he made an epoch. He is a

rebel, an unsparing rebel against his own self and writings. He is eighty years young engaged in finding out a personal equation with his non-fictional fiction. The sense of alienation he has shown in Ameena is only on a different plane now but with the same intensity and passion. His search is a self-confirming essence but not a forced activity. To express humanity has always been his inner need, plunging into solitude. If some one protests, 'but there are people' — there is always the whitmanesque democratic spirituality to come to his aid. Like Whitman he contradicts himself because he contains multitudes.

*

Tenneti Suri | # GENGHIS KHAN

Introduced by : **Nori Narasimha Sastry**

About the Novel :

Theme : the unification of the Mongol tribes in the second half of the 12th century and the begining of their conquest of the East and West under Genghis Khan from 1206 A. D.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : the desert of Gobi in Mongolia ; the latter half of the 12th century continuing to 1206 in the 13th.

Principal Characters :

YASUKAI KHAN : father of rhe hero of the novel.

TEMUGIN : (The man of Steel) Genghis Khan (World Conqueror).

KARACHAR : marernal uncle of Temugin.

CEMUGIN : step-brorher of Temugin.

SUBUTAI : another step-brother of the hero and commander-in-chief of the united Mongol forces.

SHAMAN : the religious Head of Yekka Mongol Tribe.

TUGHRAL KHAN : the original of Prestor John of European stories of the Middle ages and the rieh Keriot chief.

TAISHI : Imbecile brother of Tughral Khan and a poet and husband of Baishi who elopes to join Temugin.

YULAN OGILAI YEKKI : mother of Temugin.

KUKURSHIN KHATUN : step-mother of Temugin and mother of Cemugin.

BURTI & KULAN : two of the many wives of Temugin.

BAISHI KHATOON : wife of Taishi, who finally leaves her husband and goes to Temugin.

ABIKA : daughter of Tughral Khan's brother, who loves Temugin and finally follows Taishi to join Temugin.

Year oj Publication : 1956.

Editorial Note :

TENNETI SURI (d. 1958) has earned for himself an abiding place in Telugu fiction as a distinguished practioner of the genre of the historical novel. Before the publication of Genghiz Khan, *which consolidated his reputation, Sri Suri published a collection of short stories* (Subbalakshmi Kathalu) *a book of poems* (Arunarekhalu) *and a drama* (Na Rani). *He also achieved wide acclaim for his rendering of Charles Dickens's* A Tale of Two Cities as Rendu Mahanagaralu. *His writings are invariably marked by sensitivity and directness. He is particularly gifted in the dramatic presentation of what can be regarded otherwise as dry historical data. Though the genre of the historical novel in Telugu was skilfully handled by such stalwarts as Sri Viswa-*

natha Satyanarayana, Sri Suri brought to it a refreshing sense of the dramatic coupled with an unusual gift for narration.

Genghiz Khan *is a subtle blend of myth and history, dramatic narrative and descriptive power. Sri Suri manages to bring to the portrayal of his main characters a wealth of detail stemming from his extensive knowledge of relevant myth and history. Consequently all the characters come alive vividly and do not remain remote figures of a distant past. Moreover, the outhor eminently succeeds in wringing sympathy and pity for his central character by drawing attention to his human qualities. Genghiz Khan, as a result, emerges as an intensely moving portrait of a Herculean figure, intensely human in spite of his undoubted brutality. The novel, therefore, becomes a warm human drama pulsing with elemental passions.*

Synopsis and Essay :

The author Tenneti Suri published a few stories, two plays and a volume of poems before the publication of this novel, which is his outstandiug contribution to modern Telugu Literature.

In the last decade of the last century, the Historical novel in Andhra made its first appearance under the inspiration of Todd's *Tales of Rajasthan.* The valour and courage of Rajasthan heroes was the favourite subject of our novelists, poets and dramatists for a long time. After a few years, the exploits of Sivaji began to share with the Rajasthan heroes the favour of Andhra writers. But our writers had no intimate knowledge of the social and geographical background or the background of the heroes against which their exploits were enacted. As such, the writings were naturally unconvincing except as mere heroic incidents without a real background. But towards the end of the 1st decade of this century, a comprehensive history of Andhra was first attempted and soon other historians gradually revealed the glories of Andhra history by their labours. Thereafter Andhra writers began to present Andhra heroes. They were now in an atmosphere familiar to them and their writings began to be more and more convincing.

Of all the novels which went beyond Andhra for the background of their stories, the first successful historical novel was *Eka Vira* by Sri Viswanatha Satyanarayana. It is no wonder that the novel became very popular at once. It depicts the life in Tamiland in the post—Vijayanagara period.

The only novel to my knowledge in Telugu which went beyond India for its subject is this *Genghis Khan* of Sri Suri. One wonders how the author could catch the spirit of the Gobi Desert Tribes during the later half of the 12th century. The wild glory and the workings of a primitive race on its goal to awakened greatness is very successfully depicted in this novel. This novel is thus unique not only in the choice of the subject, but also in the great triumph accompanying it. Without any doubt it is one of the best historical novels written in modern times.

The statement of late Jawaharlal Nehru that Genghis Khan was his favourite hero seems to have inspired the author in the choice of the subject. Sri Suri added deep study of the subject with a strong imagination to transport himself into the times and atmosphere which easily carries the reader along with him. His main source for the material seems to be *The History of the Mongols* written by Mr. and Mrs. H. Howarth, F. S. A. The author acknowledged his indebtedness to the scholar couple and rightly dedicated the novel to them.

All the characters of the novel, both historical and fictional, move about the story as real living men and women. The writer has a descriptive power which can present the scenes in their true colours. Added to all this, he has a poetic gift, which has enabled him to translate the old Mongol songs with all their wild primitive beauty. The author's poetic soul is not the least that has contributed to the success of the novel.

The language used is the spoken Telugu of the educated and cultured. The language has been very well handled to suit the varying necessities of the novel : description : dialogue and narration.

The story briefly stated is that of the rise of a united Mongol power in the Gobi desert nomadic tribes in the course of

two generations during the later part of the 12th century. It ends with 1206 A. D. when the Mongol power under Genghis Khan ("World Conqueror") was poised as a great military power ready to conquer larger territories than were ever conquered by famous warriors like Alexander the Great. The Yekka Mongol tribe consisted of only 123 moving cottage tents when Yasukai, the father of Temugin, started on his great career of unification of all Mongol Tribes. This enormous growth of Mongol power in the course of two generations is one of the great wonders of history and this wonder is brought out in a realistic manner in the novel. All the barbarities not only of the wild Mongol tribes but also of the civilized Kin, Kweior and Turkish Empires are mirrored in the novel with a rare power. Modern European politics seems to have given the clue to dive deep into the workings of the opposing forces in olden times. After all, human nature is fundamentally the same in all times, although changing only in superficial extrnals at different times· The novel thus attains a universality of appeal as all great literary works do.

Temugin, the Man of Steel, is the hero. He is uneducated but has the shrewdness and wisdom in-born in all great leaders of men. He selects proper persons for the various jobs to be undertaken. He is fearless but never fool—hardy. He places himself sometimes in dangerous situations but his native wisdom always saves him. He takes quick decisions in times of urgency, but he never risks the lives of his soldiers unnecessarily. He places the interest of the United Mongol Tribes foremost and never sacrifices it to his personal ends. He is very kind and affectionate to the people under him, but he never shrinks from being very cruel towards his foes when necessity demands it. At the height of his power, he gathers the eldersof Mongols and gets down from his seat of honour and requests the elders to elect a chief of their choice. It is no wonder that the elders choose him as their leader, crown him and declare to be ready to obey his orders for marching for world conquest.

Yasukai Khan is the father of Temugin. He is the first Mongol leader who conceived the strength of a united Mongol force. He had united a number of Mongol Tribes under his leadership. It was he who first entered into relationships with the

neighbouring kingdoms. The policy adopted by him was followed up by his son Temugin and proved his wisdom and far-sightedness. Temugin had only to complete the work begun by Yasukai which was left unfinished by his being murdered by his enemies. His two pet leopards show him out as a representative of the true Mongol wild animal spirit.

Cemugin is the step-brother of Temugin and is just the contrast of Temugin. They are 'Andas'—sworn brothers. While Temugin is unlettered, Cemugin is learned in all the Chinese and other lore of the times. He has no belief in the military conquests of Temugin. He wishes to pursue a policy of peace and prosperity by encouraging cultivation and such other productive pursuits. Temugin, in fact, gives him a chance to act his own way over the Naiman tribes. He disarms them and makes them cultivate the lands. The result was by the time of the harvest festival, a dangerous revolt is brewed by the enemies and even Cemugin is almost made to lead a revolt against Temugin. Karachar, who is sent to see the festival is shot dead by the Naiman people and Cemugin himself was in great danger of his life. Only the prompt and decisive action taken by Temugin saves the unity of Mongols in the end. Cemuga serves as a foil to Temugin and brings out the greater prudence and wisdom of Temugin.

Subutai is another step-brother of Temugin and is the commander-in-chief of the Mongol forces. He executes the orders of his master to the letter without questioning. Only once he resumes to question and that when his proposal to march against the tribes which had carried away Temugin's wife during his absence, but he submits immediately when he is remineded that a Mongol leader should never question his master. He may be described as the efficient executing arm of Temugin.

Shamani is the religiovs head of the Yekka Mongol Tribes. The masses worship him as a divine being on earth. But he is a fraud. He never hesitates to put an end to all posible rivals to his exclusive influence and often proves a traitor to the Mongol cause. Both Yasukai and Temugin use him to make him declare to the people that Temugin is a son of god, born to lead the Mongol Tribes to world victory. But finally when his treachery

becomes unbearable, Temugin puts him to the sword and one feels that he had been allowed to live too long.

Karachar the maternal uncle of Temugin is lame, but he is in fact the brain of the Mongol Tribes. He is learned in most languages of the neighbours. He is not only learned in the cultured lore known in his time, but he is also a skilled craftsman in all the arts. He is a skilled sculptor too. He is very shrewed. Yasukai and Temugin make him their minister in their negotiations with the neighbouring kingdoms. First, he makes Tughral Khan the Keriot Chief to supply Yasukai latest arms, money and food stuffs in return for the military help given to him to regain his throne from his brother. Thus the Mongol army is equipped with the then known latest arms. Temugin, under his inspiration, negotiates for the supply of 500 gun-makers and makers of gun-powder. With those craftsmen in their camp, the Mangols themselves know how to manufacture gun-powder and guns, which had been the exclusive secret of the Chiness till then. The Mongol forces are organised into a regular disciplined army and armed with guns and gun-powder, it becomes invincible. His love for his sister Yulan, whom he had tended from her childhood as a parent makes him swallow all the inequities meted out by Yasukai to his Merkit Tribe while carrying her away. He influences his sister to submit to her fate with Yasukai. His devotion to Yasukai, Temugin and the Mongol cause is never shaken. till the end. It is characteristic that he meets his death while returning from a visit to the Naiman tribes placed under Chemugin, a dangerous experiment made on his own advice.

Tughral Khan may be called the villain of the piece. He is the Keriot Chief nominally subordinate to the Chinese Kin Emperor. He is fabulously rich. He calls himself a Christian with Nestorian Christians, a Buddist with Buddhist monks, a Mussulman with Turkish Moulvis and a shamanist with the native priests of Mongols. He is first introduced with his suit to Yasukai for helping him to recover his kingdom from his brother who had revolted and dethroned him with the help of Naiman Mongols. He is granted what he desires but at the expense of strengthening Mongols with the latest military equipment, money and food. On this occasion, he swears to be an 'Anda'—a sworn

brother of Yasukai, and also of Temugin who was then only a boy. He is duly replaced on his throne, but he does not hesitate to raise disruption in the Mongol camp when Yasukai had been murdered. But Temugin soon asserts himself and by following his father's policy strengthens himself much further. Now Tughral invites Temugin to his capital with the intention of making use of his presence to negotiate favourably with the Kin Emperor and Persians whose ambassadors had come to him. All the traitorous shrewdness of Tughral Khan fails before the elemental and rude shrewdness of Temugin. In this passage of wits, the Mongol bear gets away with triumph having gained the men and money for manufacturing guns and gun-powder in his own camp which was then unknown to most States. While Temugin was at Singhpal, the capital of Tughral, he had sent Christian, Buddhist and Mussalman preachers into Mongol territory to preach disruption in the name of religion. Temugin acts at once, brings back the deserting tribes and punishes all the preachers with death. Tughral Khan now believing that the Mongol force was weak, sent an organised army armed with guns under the command of an efficient general with the apparent intention of helping Temugin in his fight against the Tartars. The general on his way observes the military preparations in the Mongol camp and humbly places before Temugin the message of Tughral Khan. Temugin immediately realizes the treacherous intentions of Tughral Khan, but dissimulates. He makes his own counter move by calmly sending the general with his army to the chilly northern regions asking him to wait his own army which would join him in a day or two to fight the Tartar forces. The general waits in vain for days together. Meanwhile his army is on the brink of collapse with the child of the region and an epidemic of Malaria. The united forces of Tartars, Naimans and Markits attack the Camp with their primitive arms mistaking that it was the Mongol army under Temugin. The camping army armed with guns faces the united army with their guns in a disciplined manner. The Keriot army is almost extirpated by the superior numbers of the invaders, but it had already worked serious havoc among the united forces. Just as they are regreeting their mistake, Temugin's army steps in and subdues the united army of Tartars, Naimans and Merkits. With this, Temugin practically becomes the Master of all Mongolian Tribes,

Tughral onee more conspires with the Naimans while Chemugin is sent as the ruler of the Naiman tribes. Here, hc almost succeeds in making Chemuga revolt against Temugin. Bu Chemugan's fidelity and Tamugin's prompt action averts the danger. Finally, Tughral Khan comes out in his true colours openly leading a united armies of the Kin Emperor, the Emperor of Turkey and his own under his own leadership. He camps with this enormous force on the Kharta Plateau on the banks of the river Karolin. He had sent religious missions to preach disruption in the Mongol camp. He feels himself invincible and is elated at the impending suppression of the Mongol power. In his pride, he forgets that the enemy also may pit treachery against his own treachery. He declares a war of Peace against Temugin and proudly disdains the peace mission sent by him. His pride is further heightened, when he sees that tribe after tribe was descerting Temugin and joining his forces. But these Tribes were not deserters in fact. One night they all rise up to a man on a signal and cut off the throats of the sleeping soldiers of Tughral Khan. By the time his army realized the danger, and was trying to organise resistance, the regular army of Temugin attacks them and wins an easy total victory. Tughral Khan is killed in his own tent of gold and silk by Temugin himself.

The women characters of the novel mirror the wild nature of the Mongols more forcibly than the men. Yulan, the mother of Temugin had been forcibly carried away on her wedding day. Not caring for the severe whipping, she resists the advances of Yasukai even after she was big with Temugin. She tears her belly to kill the unwanted babe. Karachar, her elder brother interferes and makes her submit to her fate. She fights with her rival wives and with her daughter-in-law. She is whipped by her husband and son puts her in stocks. On hearing of the death of her brother Karachar, she demands Temugin to bring her brother back and finally dies by dashing her head to the tent pole. Kukushan Khatum, the mother of Chemugan, mourns for the suicide of her son, calls it a cowardly death and declares that she would have been proud of him if he had died fighting against Temugin. Burti the senior wife of Temugin gets a severe whipping for enraging her mother-in-law. Kulan, another wife of

Temugin lives with him for six months on a mountain like a wild beast.

In contrast with these Mongol women, Keriot women come into the story : *Baishi Khatunis* the wife of Baishi, the imbecile brother of Tughral Khan. In her advanced age, she enjoys life for once with Temugin and does not like to live any more. Temugin brings her back to life by his caresses and finally she joins Temugin taking with her *Abika* the young daughter of another brother of Tughral Khan. She had also fallen in love with Temugin on first sight.

Taishi, the husband of Baishi is represented as an imbecile poet. A Veena musician from Kashmir, *Arghasun* is introduced. In the end he is depicted as having learnt real music from a cowherd of Mongolia. All the religious preachers are represented as either cowards or spies of the civilized powers. But there is one honourable exception. It is Dharmapal Cuyushri (Guru Sri). a sincere Buddhist monk from India. He had discarded kingship for the life of a Buddhist monk and had come to Tartar to carry the peace message of the Buddha to the Tartars after being venerated by the great and small all over India. When the Tartar Tribe with whom he was staying was conquered by Temugin, he is brought to the Mongol camp as a captive. Karachar sees him on the point of death from freezing. But immediatelly, the Shaman priest sees a rival in him and makes Temugin sacrlfice him as a victim to the God of Mongol. The calm manner in which he submits to death almost haunts Temugin afterwards.

The novel begins with Yasukai carrying away Yulan on her wedding night by force and ends with the Kural Tai—Meeting of the Elders-in the Spring of 1206 under a large tent. This is shortly after the victory over the united forces of the Keriot, Kin and Turkish forces. Temugin comes down his seat of honour and requests the elders to choose their chief to world victory. The elders choose him as their chief and even crown him.

These are the characters and this is the story presented by Tenneti Suri. It is a pity that he passed away very young in

1956 a novelist not only of promise but of actual achivement embodied in this great novel. In the course of this novel, the author has presented all the cruel and barbarous acts of Temugin and other Mongols. But we are reminded that barbaric treatment was not the exclusive trait of the wild Mongols. We are reminded that the great grand-father of Temugin by name Hemukai Bhagattur, while he had been to his father-in-law's house, had been captured and handed over to the Chinese Emperor Tasson. This Kin Emperor is glorified in history as the emperor who brought Buddhist monks for preaching the message of Buddha and of peace. This Emperor had made Henukai to be laid on wooden horse, nailed to it, and flayed while still alive and cut to pieces. The four ambassadors sent by Temugin to the Court of the Turkish Emperor were ordered to be beheaded and their heads sent back to Temugin as the Emperor's reply to the Mission.

The recent events in the modern world known to all are too many to be cited here in particular. Cruelty and barbarity is not exclusive to the Mongols to the 12th and 13th centuries, but is universal to men of all times and climes. All the religions, all the peace-lovers of the world have not succeeded to this day to extirpate the essential brute in man. Human power seems to lie in the power to destroy. For any conqueror. a regular system of spies seems to be a necessity. Temagin had such a system and his success was no less due to the timely information carried to him by his spies. This aspect also is not forgotten by the author in this novel.

Genghis Khan is one of the best of modern novels with realism. blended with idealism and poetic imagination.

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Dasarathi Rangacharya	CHILLARA DEVULLU [MINOR DEITIES]

Introduced by : **Chakravartula Seshacharya**

About the Novel :

Theme : changing patterns of rural life in Telengana in the early thirties.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : any village in Telengana, early thirties.

Principal Characters :

RAMA REDDY,
VENKAT RAO,
SARANGAPANI,
VANAJA &
MANJARI.

Year of Publication : 1970.

Editorial Note :

DASARATHI RANGACHARYA (b. 1930), is one of the very few Telugu novelists who have succeded in the rare art of making an apparently regional novel transcend its intrinsic limitations and become an articulation of the entire human condition. While Chillara Devullu, *in its locale and setting, is rooted in the Telengana region, it is essentially a human tale of an enduring theme : the predicament of the lower classes oppressed by a feudal regime. The resurgence of these exploited and hapless people is almost impossible since the minor deities—the political and bureaucratic bosses—continue to have a vested interest in*

thc status quo *and do everything possible to perpetuate it. It is against this background of semi-feudal society in the throes of a democratic rebirth, that Sri Rangacharya unrolls his fictional canvas with an authentic panorama of vividly drawn characters. The signal triumph of the novel is to lay bare without any reservation or distortion the atmosphere of intrigue, nepotism and overall corruption that eats into the marrow of rural life. As such the predominant merit of the book lies not only in its realistic and authentic portrayal of rural life but also in the highly muted and artistic criticism of corrupt adminstration at the grass roots level.*

The overall distinction of the novel. however, lies as much in its socio-political critique as in its art of characterization. This is particularly perceptible in regard to the portrayal of women characters. Vanaja, Manjari and Thayaru remain memorable and vivid portraits, drawn with exquisite skill and minute attention to detail. Abovc all, Sri Rangacharya moulds the Telengana dialect into a highly sensitized medium capable of communicating the subtle shades of emotion and sentiment. As such Chillara Devullu *remains a thematic as well as a linguistic landmark.*

Sri Rangacharya is also a distinguished writer of many books for children and an accomplished translator.

Synopsis :

Rama Reddy, the Deshmukh, is the supreme monarch of a village in Telangana in the erstwhile Hyderabad State under the Nizam. Venkata Rao, the Patwari, is his sinister counterpart.

While Reddy and the Patwari are discussing the arrangements for the arrival of Bahadur Yar Jung, for the purpose of converting untouchables into Islam, Sarangapani approaches Reddy. He solicits his patronage and Reddy readily offers him a sanctuary.

Bahadur Yar Jung converts the untouchables, and later, Narenderji, an Aryasamaj Pracharak, re-converts them.

Vanaja, a girl meant to entertain the guests of Reddy, is entranced by Sarangapani. He is appointed as a music teacher to Thayaru, who is born to a concubine of the Patwari.

Sarangapani proceeds to Hyderabad and returns with a variety of articles including a camera. While examining the photographs of Manjari and Vanaja, he notices a striking resemblence between the eyes of the two subjects.

The Patwari has wheedled money from a Lambada on the pretext of acquiring land for him. The Lambadas swarm to the village to tackle the Patwari. He makes a false report to the Police and gets them arrested. The Police Amin attempts to rape Lakshmi, a Lambada woman. When she stoutly resists, he shoots and kills her. The Lambadas are taken to the police station in the town. The Patwari and Thayaru flee to the same place. Lakshmi's husband, Bhikya, is beaten to death by a constable. The Judge acquits the constable and awards punishment to the Lambadas.

Manjari is lured by the music of Sarangapani and becomes keen on cultivating the art. In the meantime, Vanaja's mental processes undergo a transformation. She recalls her unsavoury past. She is the illegitimate daughter of Reddy. Therefore, she concludes that Pani could not form a sacred relationship with her. So she resolves to regard him as his blood brother and informs him accordingly.

Thayaru returns to the village to participate in the *Bathkamma* festival. She invites Pani to her home and tries to entice him. Pani, repulsed by her bestial gesture, pushes her away. She vows either to banish Pani from the village or make him cower at her feet.

Manjari meets Pani on the river side and is ravished by his loveliness. Under orders of Reddy, Pani teaches music to Manjari and Vanaja bears company. Her very sight makes Manjari's heckles go up. Reddy suspects Vanaja to be the cause of his daughter's discomfiture, and showers blows on her. Ins his attempts to protect Vanaja, Pani receives lashes. He decides

to leave the place. Reddy persuades him to stay. Pani remains in order to console Manjari. His music ministers to her distressed mind.

Reddy wildly hits a washerman for the alleged offence of stealing tamarind, and he perishes. Reddy is plagued by a succession of fears and beseeches the patwari to hush up the affair. Ths Patwari agrees to oblige him only if he induces Pani to wed Thayaru. Reddy persuades Pani to marry Thayaru. Pani declines. Reddy asks him to clear out. Pani quits. Vanaja requests Manjari to bring back Pani, her brother. Manjari repents for having harboured suspicion and envy. She entreasts her father to get back Pani. In the meanwhile, Reddy comes across a photograph depicting the scene in which he had done the washerman to death. Realising that Pani had gone possessing the dreadful secret, Reddy commissions Madarsab to do away with Pani.

Reddy vomits blood. Manjari's illness suffers a relapse. The village doctor advises Reddy to proceed to the city. Reddy, his wife, daughter and Vanaja reach Madras.

On the platform they meet Pani. His presence brings a fresh lease of life to Manjari. Misfortune makes Reddy a prodigal son and he apologises to Pani for his evil doings. Reddy is admitted to the General Hospital and the disease is diagnosed as cancer.

An Acharya, who comes to Patwari's house for delivering religious discourses seduces Thayaru. She throws the Patwari into the street. He turns insane and is subsequently hacked to pieces by the Lambadas.

Rama Reddy's brother-in-law arrives at Madras. Much to his delight, he descovers that Pani is no other than his long lost son.

Rama Reddy breathes his last with only Vanaja at his bed side.

Essay :

Born in Gudur in Warangal district and educated at Hyderabad, Mr. Dasarathi Rangacharya is a Telugu writer of versatile power and many moods. His compositions embrace biographies, novels, short stories and essays. The novel, *Chillara Devullu*, secured him immense reputation, and also received an award by the Andhra Pradesh Sahitya Akademy in 1971. His other novels *Maya Jalatharu* and *Modugupulu*, have earned equally wide acclaim.

With the publication of *Chillara Devullu* (1970), a new type of fiction in Telugu swum into view, and it is new because it has had few predecessors. It has an unusual and original theme revealing the author's lively power of description and gift of drawing characters with the sharpest lines and colours. There is a delicate blend of character and atmosphere, a comprehension of the inter-play of significant and insignificant emotions and sense of pity "for the tears in human things."

The Telangana region, during the early thirties, which formed an integral part of the erstwhile Nizam's dominions, was a citadel of feudalism. This novei, which has its locale in Telengana, is a remarkable recreation of the life, atmosphere, tone and style of this period. The Deshmukh, the Patel and the Patwari constitute the lesser deities of the village and the artless and the untutored common folk bow to their oppression as to a natural power. The outcastes, the poor peasants and the under dogs of society groan in pain and perish under their baleful tyranny and jesuit craftiness. The passion that seethes behind these deities to stay in power--brow-beating, back-stabbing, bartering and bribing—is portrayed with a challenging insight. The element of romance which furnishes the light and music and fragrance of love is also conspicuous.

Let us glance at the other ingredients of the novel. Due note must be taken of its value as a representation of the distinctive qualities, manners and customs of rural Telengana. We see the nefarious custom of maintaining girls to satisfy the sexual appetites of the guests of rich landlords, and the practice of making orderlies run in the front and rear of convoys. The con-

version of Hindus into Islam, adding bribery to force, is reminiscent of the days of Feroz Shah Tughlak. The village, however, has its brighter side. The poor of the village belong to each other and to the village itself, unlike the poor of the cities who belong to no one and to nothing. Although the village is ridden with caste divisions, each divislon has its own cohesion, and all the divisions together have a single shape. In festivals like *Dasara* and *Bathkamma*, the entire populace is involved. These festivals are celebrated with great eclat, joyfully and reverentially. Considerations of wealth, status, caste, and age, do not arise. Thus, during the visit of the Acharya, the Patwari plays host to a large and varied gathering.

The author's power to draw characters—original, life-like and varied—is also masterly. To use the words of Elizabeth Bowen, "they have a palpable physical reality."

Of the chief characters, Ramareddy and Venkata Rao are presented to us, not just as isolated individuals, but against the historical and social backgrounds which produced them. Reddy is a coleossal egotist to whom ascendency to power is everything and ethics and morals mere counters on the table. The urge of personal ambition drives him to commit atrocious villainies, and turns him into a monster. He converts the village into a private *sheikdom*. As a result, everything trembles at the sou·d of his voice or footsteps—people, plants, doors, windows as well as furniture. He abducts Vanaja's mother, pitchforks Vanaja into a life of shame, and kidnaps the potter's wife. Cruel and ruthless he plans the assasination of Pani and despatches Peeriga in a fit of frenzy. One cannot, however, say that he is completely devoid of humane virtues. Although tough like tempered steel he is open hearted and helps people at times of special distress. An ideal father that he is, he evinces an unfailing and anxious concern in the welfare of his daughter.

Venkata Rao, the Patwari, is a jug of poison with cream on top. He adopts his accents to changing situations and his conscience is a kind of box of tricks in which something of everything is to be found. His brain, sharp and trenchant like the blade of Damscus, is mainly a devil's workshop. Narayya and

a Lambada become victims of his fraudulent machinations. The Lambadas are duped, beaten and two of them are murdered. While culprits are honourably acquitted, the innocent Lambadas are sent to prison, and the court merely serves the ends of injustice. The Patwari seduces the toddy-taper's wife, inspires his murder, and drives his wife mad. Yet, he is not wholly evil and there is a somblance of goodness in him. His solicitude to gte Thayaru, his illegitimate daughter, married and comfortably established in life, is deep and abiding. He has also a veneration for godly men.

Sarangapani is a magnetic character capable of keying the reader up, as though he (the reader) is in the presence of some one with whom he is in love. In portraying him, the author has established a rapport between music and people. Pani's proficiency in music is suggested in the words of Jiten : 'In music he has taken a place among Tunbura and Narada.' His music revives the rugged nerves of Reddy and restores Manjari to gaiety and good health. His heart is like a mountain stream, so pure in its tenderness. To Vanaja his advent is like a fresh breeze pouring into a dark and stuffy room, and gives her a better heart, a new pulse, a proud and erect carriage. In addition to being erudite, he owns a scintilating mind. He is open as the day and his mind has no blue pencil. His conception of right and wrong, cold, clinical detachment, polish, poise and perspicacity mark him out as a remarkable character. But this concentration of virtues makes him seem too good to be true.

Of the women characters, Vanaja is a class by herself. The author probes her soul and reproduces each scar in her mind. As a consequence, far from being a creatiure to be abhorred, she becomes an object of pity. An unconscious tool of an accursed custom and fate, she is compelled to become a victim of the lust of the guests who visit Reddy's mansion. She despises her degraded life, but is helpless to retrieve herself. She grows enamoured of Pani and yearns to wed him. Soon, she recalls her infamous past, makes a clean breast of it to Pani, and urges him to regard her as his sister. "How could Pani, a noble soul, form so sacred a relationship with a tart," she asks.

Shy as a swan is Manjari, 'a maiden never bold.' It is clear that she becomes a symbol of man's ideal, the supreme value of love. Warmly human, she has generous impulses.

Thayaru, the lust-stricken : the ravenous and corrupt Amin; that epitome of courage and womanly virtue, Lambada girl Lakshmi ; Mangamma, gentle and luckless—these are some of the other characters created in the alembic of the author's imagination.

As a writer expressing himself in a style which is plain, concrete and innocent of inflation, Dasarathi Rangacharya has a high place. In dialogues, all the characters except Pani, employ the Telengana dialect which is instinct with the naturalness and life of spoken speech. As a result the author's prose offers few allurements of verbal grace and jewelled phrase, but it has the veracity of an undeluded mind. However, in his craving after effect, he sometimes has recourse to heavily loaded diction, and as a result, some of the passages become mawkish.

As Somerset Maugham observed, 'No novel is perfect.' Like a flaw in a precious stone, there is a faultincss in the form that renders perfection an impossible ideal. No wonder that Mr. Rangacharya's skill as novelist seems to desert him in some places. Certain passages in chapter six, and the passages relating to the photographs in chapter nine, for instance, are encumbered with endless repetitions, barren tracts and masses of unimportant detail. These violate our critical sense of order and imaginative relcvance. The ninth chapter, dealing wtth the visit of Pani to Madapati Hanumantha Rao, can be deleted from the book. A novel is not a document fortified by authorities. Further more. Pani gives away to introspection and reflection in the midst of his communication with others, and this obtrudes the smooth flow of the narrative.

But of the many novels with which Rangacharya has delighted his generation, it is safe to say that *Chillara Devullu* will sail the literary seas till they run dry. It may be that other fruits of his art will survive the tooth of time, but in this novel assuredly is enshrined a rare, imperishable talent.

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Buchi Babu

CHIVARAKU MIGILEDI !

[ALL THAT REMAINS !]

Introduced by : **D. Ramalingam**

About the Novel :

Theme : the conflict between self and society as manifest particularly during the inter-war period.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : coastal districts and Rayalaseema ; 1930's and '40's.

Principal Characters :

DAYANIDHI : hero of the novel, a medico who later becomes a full-fledged doctor ; a rebel and non-conformist in tradition-bound society.

KOMALI : an uneducated, rustic girl who later was a concubine of a rich man and having been deserted returns to Dayanidhi.

AMRITHAM : a married cousin of Dayanidhi, a very charming young woman who has a soft corner for Dayanidhi.

INDIRA : Dayanidhi's wife, an innocent young woman who suffers silently.

SUSILA : an educated girl, friend of Dayanidhi, who desired to marry him.

NAGUMANI : an educated girl, friend of Dayanidhi, who is intimate with him.

RAJA : an educated youth who is a personal friend of Dayanidhi.

Year of Publication : 1952.

Editorial Note :

BUCHI BABU'S (pseudonym for SIVARAJU VENKATA SUBBA RAO : 1916-1967) contribution to the Telugu novel is rich and varied. A strikingly original thinker, he imbued the Telugu novel with intellectual maturity and philosophic depth. With a pronounced bias towards rationalism and empiricism, his central concern as a novelist was to explore the complex nature of human existence particularly in regard to the relation between man and woman. Consequently, Buchi Babu's novel comes closest to being a "perpetual quest for reality" through the lens of social observation. It tends to be dense with philosophic reflections couched in an intensely individual style. Even in regard to technique, Buchi Babu is an accomplished master of the modes of interior monologue and stream of consciousness. In spite of heavy philosophic leanings, Buchi Babu's writing is instinct with the joy of life stemming from a positive, affirmative attitude. He never succumbed to despair and always celebrated the redeeming qualities of human existence. Accordingly, love is the central principle of life and in evoking the tender moments of this passion Buchi Babu is supreme. Above all, he moulded Telugu language into a supple instrument responsive to the subtlest nuances of feeling and emotion. In addition, Buchi Babu's writings are full of naturalistic images evoked with effortless ease. Apart from being a novelist, he was also a distinguished short story writer, playwright and critic. Among his writings Adavi Kachina Vennela *(1951)*, Darina Poye Danayya *(1952)*, Adyantalu : Madhya Radha *(1954) and* Shakespeare Sahiti Paramarsa *(1966) deserve particular mention.*

In CHIVARAKU MIGILEDI, Buchi Babu catches the elusive ethos of the period between the two wars the uncertainties of which had their impact on a whole generation. Dayanidhi is a representative of

this period when all values were in a state of flux overlaid with a wide-spread sense of spiritual sterility. Bereft of enduring faith—either in the cultural or familial traditions—Dayanidhi's quest is as much a personal as a universal one : it becomes the quest for meaning, for a code of personal relations which can withstand the unpredictable nature of frail flesh. Ridden by a sense of insecurity, Dayanidhi finds in woman the redeeming feature of existence. As wife, mother and mistress, it is woman who, for Dayanidhi, redeems the sterility of life. As such the one thing that remains imperishably is love and affection, charity and understanding. Chivaraku Migiledi *is, thus, a triumphant assertion of humanism, an affirmation of the essential sanctity of life.*

Synopsis :

The novel presents the unsuccessful but interesting attempts of a highly educated and conscious youth to find out the meaning of life and its human values. Dayanidhi, a student of Medicine takes life seriously and is very much inquisitive to discover its mystery and meaning. Being a rebel and non-conformist, he disregards society which has its own norms through which it controls the normal individuals. Dayanidhi's uninhibited ways of living and his total disregard for established customs comes into conflict with the society around him. His father does not approve his behaviour, especially his dealings with young women. His mother sympathises with him, but her illicit love affairs in the past haunt him. The character of his mother is not directly depicted in the novel. But society and even the persons with whom he is intimate freely refer his mother's bad reputation right in his presence. It wounds his feelings. Yet he loves his mother deeply. He is enchanted by the beauty and charm of Komali who is in her teens, being uneducated and rustic. Dayanidhi who is a Brahmin, frequently visits Komali and since she belongs to a lower class, this is resented by society. This becomes a topic of gossip and condemnation. In the beginning he shows his desire for sexual relations with Komali. But when an opportunity comes, he misses it deliberately, since in his opinion the human body is not meant fro desecration by physical enjoyment. There were other educa-

ted girls for his choice if he wanted to marry, but to him they are snobs. Finally he marries an ordinary girl Indira, the daughter of a Police Inspector who by his loyal service was expecting a title from the British rulers. But immediately after marriage, Dayanidhi participates in the Non-Cooperation movement, and with this his relations with his father-in-law are strained. Consequently, his marriage with Indira is not consummated.

Dayanidhi sets up practice as a doctor in a town. But his experiments in treating a woman patient are misunderstood and he becomes the target of social attack. Some other developments, like the death of Susila under suspicious circumstances, Komali leaving the place to spend her life as a concubine of a Zamindar, and his casual affair with Amritham one rainy night, make him a solitary figure in the environment.

Famine and plague in Rayalaseema (a region of Andhra) attract him for service to humanity in his capacity as a doctor. He goes there and starts serving the people with missionary zeal. He discovers a highly valuable diamond which fetches him sufficient money to build a hospital and residential quarters for himself there. As he was thus trying to settle down there, Komali returns to him in helpless condition having been discarded by the zamindar. He gives her shelter, but does not have any relation with her, though both live under the same roof.

The differences of opinion and misunderstandings between the people of coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema affect Dayanidhi's life and career in that backward region. Since Dayanidhi hails from the comparatively developed coastal Andhra, some local people develop hatred against him. They talk ill of him to wound his feelings. His mother's character, his living with Komali without formal marriage become the topics of their gossip. The atmosphere becomes emotionally surcharged and all his constructive efforts are destroyed and burnt to ashes by the incited mob. Dayanidhi, accompanied by Komali, leaves the place sadly disillusioned. But he does not admit defeat in his quest to know the meaning of life. He comes to the conclusion that the quest with all its experiences culminating in his reconciliation with the

realities of life is itself the meaning of life. Understanding and a little kindness towards the fellow human being was all that he desired, but could not find it in the society around him. He again becomes a solitary figure. It seemed as if he is a permanantly lonely soul in this crowded society — in this wide world. Perhaps this situation is inevitable for rebels who go their own way. He suffered from this lack of affection and deplored it. But undaunted he continued his journey on the path of life.

Essay :

Ask any student of modern Telugu literature, especially of prose fiction, his opinion about the noted novels which stand as landmarks in the history of the Telugu novel, he will reply without a moment's hesitation that *Chivaraku Migiledi* is certainly one of them. Its author, late Buchi Babu, a prolific short-story writer with a dozen collected volumes to his credit, a distinguished playwright whose plays have been staged for a number of years, a critic with a keen insight into world literary trends and an essayist with a brilliant grasp of men and matters is regarded as an outstanding novelist and exceptional genius. Though, surprisingly enough, he wrote only one novel this is itself a masterpiece replete with a distinct literary style which is unique both in language and the manner of expression.

Before going into the story, it would be worthwhile to refer to the lengthy foreword the author had written to the novel through which he talks to his reader about the origin of the novel and the social values he set for himself in producing this work. Buchi Babu conceived the novel in 1943 and actually began writing it in 1946 when he was just 30. It immediately drew the attention of thinkers and literateurs all over Andhra as it began to be serialised in a well-known weekly. It was first published in book form in 1952 and later went into several editions including one abridged version. The author originally desired to call the book as *Ekantam* (Solitude), but later a literary friend of his suggested the present title.

As Buchi Babu himself pointed out, the novel depicts the lives of representative young men and women in Andhra during

the period between the two world wars. He has also observed that the mystery of the life and the efforts of man to understand it are the main basis of any great work of art, and that the same is the base for his novel also. The hero, Dayanidhi who is a medico, is obviously meant to be a rebel and a non-conformist in a largely traditional society. He loves his mother ardently as she is the only person who understands him and sympathises with him in his words and deeds. But there are rumours about his mother's conduct and his friends and relatives freely talk about her illicit love affairs. Dayanidhi is tormented by hearing such stories. He takes a fancy to Komali, a girl in his village endowed with natural grace and beauty, but uneducated and rustic. He becomes intimate with her and frequently visits her hut. Though he has a strong physical desire for her, when the opportune moment comes, he desists from sexual contact since he feels that such natural beauty (he compares her to the Taj Mahal, stars and moon) is only to be contemplated and adored with devotion and not desecrated by sexual enjoyment. He also comes across several educated girls such as Susila, Nagumani etc., but they all repulse him by their snobbery. Eventually he marries Indira who is a stranger to him, without any accomplishments, but the marriage itself is not consummated. Dayanidhi's married cousin Amrutham attracts him and she alone, next to his mother, understands him and genuinely sympathises with his refractory attitudes with graceful manner, enchanting conversation and above all by her intimitable natural, unaffected behavionr. This intimacy develops gradually and accidentally he enjoys her physically on her own inducement. All these experiences make Dayanidhi a solitary figure. Fed up by the atmosphere surrounding him, he moves to Rayalaseema, a backward region in Andhra called Ceded districts which were at that time afflicted by plague and famine. Dr. Dayanidhi serves the people there with missionary zeal, and starts life anew there with a view to achieve some human values about which, however, he is not definite. He discovers a precious diamond there in the rocky terrain and with the money the diamond fetches, he constructs a hospital there along with residential quarters for himself. He also initiates mining activity there providing employment to hundreds of local workers. Thus as he was settling there, past experiences and

forces encircle him again. Komali, who spent her life as mistress of a rich man for some years after Dayanidhi left his place, returns to Dayanidhi in his new settlement and stays with him. But Dayanidhi keeps her at a distance despite her provocative approaches with a view to becoming his mistress. But the misunderstandings and hatred between the people of Coastal Andhra and the Ceded districts crop up with great ferocity and Dayanidhi becomes a victim to them. All his constructive work is destroyed in a catastrophe created by fellow human beings. He is dazed at the lack of love and affection between human beings. He escapes death and drifts to some other place to seek a new beginning. (The author has dedicated the novel to "Mother Andhra," obviously wishing unity and harmony among the people speaking one language and having a common origin and history.)

Before going into the merits of the novel, it would be useful if we get acquainted with the personality of the author and his background. Buchi Babu was born and brought up in Coastal Andhra where nature's bounty had its indelible impact on him in his formative years. He was a student of English literature and a voracious reader. He read all sorts of books on all subjects. Dickens, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Tennyson, Tolstoy, Tagore, Hardy,Bernard Shaw,Bertrand Russel,P.G. Wodehousell. Somerset Maugham, H. G. Wells, Radhakrishnan and Aldous Huxley-all of them influenced and moulded his literary personality. Buchi Babu was also well-versed with the new trends of writing in Telugu by emnent poets and writers when he was a college student, besides his acquaintance with ancient and medieval literatures. Like all educated youth in the post-education career, the author too was confronted with the questions: "Is there a meaning to this life? Is there a God? Is the *Karma* theory a fact? Is there a place for individual effort and moral values? Is there a truth beyond man's reach? Why this creation at all?" The author has revealed in one of his brilliant essays that at a time when he was preoccupied with the above questions, two thinkers wrought a profound change in his outlook. One was Bertrand Russell whose 5-page essay entitled "A Free Mna's Worship," had an indelible impact in his mind. Similar was the case with Dr. S. Radhakrishnan's Hibbert Lectures published

under the title *An Idealist View of Life*. Both the above-mentioned philosophers had something in common which gave hope and an inkling of idealism which was essential for reviving the youth of those days who were at crossroads and were drifting. It was eight years after reading Russell's essay that Buchi Babu completed his novel. The author had an occasion to come into contact with the people of the so-called backward Ceded districts named Rayalaseema and finding the misunderstandings among the people there, the question that arose in his mind was "Why people hate each other?" Dwelling on this point, the author once observed that the greatest tragedy in human lives is one's inability to love the fellow human being. After a great deal of inquisitive thought, he found the reason and expressed it in his novel remarking "when a person does not know what he wants, he simply hates." With a view to get rid of the heaviness in his heart, he wrote this novel.

Another important aspect in the story is the suffering the youngsters are subjected to on account of the wrong-doings of their elders. In this novel, the character of the hero's mother has not been delineated fully. There are only references to her in the dialogues of characters who deliberately want to wound the feelings of the hero. But the consequences of her conduct chase the hero like shadows and the social stigma attached to it fouls his life. The author calls it an 'atrocity.' He goes back to the story of Renuka and Jamadagni in the Hindu mythology for a precedent and also refers to Shakespeare's celebrated play *Hamlet* after making a passing reference to Guy de Maupassant's story "Pierre and Jean" in which too the evils befalling the children of an immoral mother are depicted in an effective manner.

The novel begins with the question "what is it that remains ultimately?" The author proceeds to say that if some one knows answer to this question, he might as well know the mystery of this life. "What could be the meaning of this life?" And at the end of this 500-page novel the writer makes the following comment on the hero who had undergone so many tragedies and devastating mental torture. "He is unable to change this society. If he attempts, there is trouble, revenge and

conflict. Hence he should reconcile with himself. That he has achieved now. Peace, pure bliss have now sprung up in him. These are not to be found in the outer world. His heart is an avalanche which puts on the fire. At long last, he has acquired that liberatity, and broadmindedness which can keep this mad world away, feeling only pity for it. He was able to secure the spiritual outlook by which he can brush aside religion, God and the creatures around him." And after making a relevant observation that what man in this world requires is not religions, not the Gods not the vows and politics. The author emphatically states that what a human being yearns for is some compassion, and a little kindness from his fellow human beings, The author ends the novel: "Dayanidhi again comes to the same question with which he started (in the beginning of the novel). What remained ultimately is not the answer to his question. Only memories of his endeavours to know the answer to the vexing question he was confronted with. Ultimately he was reconciled with himself. That is all."

When viewed from the point of plot construction and development, it is not apparently a novel worth-mentioning. In fact it might appear as a loosely-knit novel, without the qualities of the craft of fiction. The author has apparently not bothered about the plot and the craft. His aim was something else. It is a novel of ideas emerging from mental conflict, combined with artistic portrayal of characters. The chief merit of the novel is the psycho-analytical presentation of characters-both men and women who make their contribution to the story, highlighting their physical appearances, mental attitudes, individual traits and the peculiar ways in which they express themselves in a language that betrays their personal peculiarities along with the motives they are upto. The main question that confronts the reader after finishing the novel is "What is the secret of the character of Dayanidhi, the hero?" I am sure there cannot be any unanimous opinion among the readers since the character is a complex one. Susila who wanted to marry him, but miserably failed to attract him, alleges that he has no morals, that he is a womaniser having sexual contacts with Komali, Nagumani and Amritam, that he attracts young women by his sophistication, only to use them as his playthings and then forgets everything.

Komali remarks that he knows only how to stand and stare at girls and nothing more. Amrutham has a soft corner for him from the beginning and perhaps that explains the 'reward' she got from him. His friend Raja says instead of living life in a care-free manner, Dayanidhi takes life seriously and always bothers himself thinking about life. One thing we have to note here is that nowhere has hero of the novel claimed that he is a purist or moralist, though he is very much concerned with the ethics of society which in his opinion aims at controlling the individuals, prescribing their limits and drawing their boundaries. It is true that he confronts society in an uninhibited manner, he attracts young women by his physical and intellectual personality, he visits Komali openly ; he has an affair with Amrutam, a married woman and never pleads that he is chaste. He has his weaknesses and he never denies them. He suffers indignities, feels mentally tortured by the society around him, even weeps silently, and yet still marches on the path of life without any hesitation. His is a very complex personality, with several facets and given to unpredictable thinking. He led his own life as he thought it proper without inhibiting his feelings and ideas and consequently undergoes sufferings in a society to which he is opposed. He has concern for the fellow human beings and expected the same in return, but is sadly disillusioned. My own feeling is that it is the one character in Telugu literature about which a simple unidimensional estimation is just not possible because the author skilfully moulded him so, probably lending some of his own elusive personality to it. But it cannot, on this account, be regarded as an autobiographical novel.

Apart from the hero, two other characters draw the attention of the reader. One is Komali, an unmarried girl in her teens when the novel opens, who is rustic, has natural beauty, is fully feminine, provokes sex in any man, but is humanistic, kind, frank and daring. She took life as it came her way. As a discarded mistress, she comes back to Dayanidhi who gives her shelter, but does not respond to her approaches because for him the original Komali is already dead. Dayanidhi calls it platonic love. Still she loves him, adores him, shares the ignominy society heaps on him and remains with him till the end following him in his journey through life as his sole companion. Komali

is one of the rare women characters in the history of the Telugu novel, who are physically very much present in the story and yet seem as distant illusions like a mirage which is never accessible. The writer desired it so, and the portrait has come so well according to his expectations that he himself says the person in Komali is something like Taj Mahal, a dream, a beauty which cannot be touched and spoiled.

Another interesting character is Amritham. She has no modern education. She is married to a village official who too has no modern education and is a stranger to sophisticated ways of life. Yet she is not dissatisfied with her life. She is quite optimistic, taking life as it comes to her and is content with it, whatever it is. She is a cheerful woman kindly disposed towards Dayanidhi. Circumstances prompted her to induce Dayanidhi and one rainy night she has an affair with him on her own. Normally, an average reader does not like such characters who fall a prey to the lustful desire. But here is the character of Amritham who in spite of her having lost her chastity still commands the readers' interest and regard on account of her sweet demeanour, kind disposition, pleasing conversation, feminine grace and above all human attributes, though she has no fair complexion, according to the novelist. Strictly speaking, she comes under the category of fallen women. But just as Urvashi, the celestial nymph, she is an enchanting person and no reader of the novel can ever forget her, since she is so fascinating a woman. Her mere presence enlivens dull and gloomy situations.

The novel abounds in beautiful descriptions of nature and human beings with their environments. The novelist himself has stated on one occasion that he finds delight in describing nature in its pristine purity. He himself being a good painter and connoisseur of arts, his protrayals of men and women and the painting of natural scenery in his inimitable style have drawn appreciation not only from discerning readers, but also from modern artists and poets as well. They were baffled at the poetic qualities in his prose. A few writers of later generation even imitated Buchi Babu's and soon he became a model for them. He was a writer of writers. At one place referring to Amritham, he observes : "To watch her was like looking at the sunset in a

deep valley." The writer's description of Dayanidhi's affair with Amrutham that rainy night is enough to place him among the category of writers with similar talents in world literature: "The thunder and lightning seemed as if someone broke golden swords into pieces and threw them away at the sky. The doors were banging themselves all of a sudden by the mighty wind. The dried leaves on the ground were being swept into the room. The light was dancing. The thunderbolts were resounding. Like a tidal wave, the wind engulfed the room. The light fainted and collapsed after finishing its last rhythmic movement. The arms of Amrutham suddenly fell on his shoulders. Some invisible force was pushing him downwards to a ravine. He unknowingly fell on the bed. It was darkness all around. His eyes opened in the lap of Amrutham. Her midriff was burning his forehead like the fire in the night of a winter. Her breasts were softly cutting his eyelids. Her arms were taking him to some undisclosed destination. Amrutham's lock of hair gave way. Her braided hair completely covered him. Her sari got drenched by the tears in the night and her thighs were getting warm in that chilly weather. The back of his neck was covered with the tears as if the downpour was singling him out for an attack." I am sorry I am not successful in the rendering of the para. One should read the original.

Similarly the author's description of the marriage of Dayanidhi with Indira, with all its caustic and cynical comments is a memorable passage. I do not want to translate it lest I may fail in my attempt. The novel is a veritable mine of ideas, definitions, statements and observations which are quite relevant to the situations and they are reflections and aspersions on contemporary society. Of course they are a part of his denouncement of men and matters. I venture to reproduce some of them here for the benefit of the reader."Only the women know how to tease and torture a man," "A woman accepts the husband for the sake of marriage, while a man consents for marriage for the sake of a woman," "These women (educated, rich and sophisticated) never want a real love. What they really want is a qualified gentleman desiring one of them from among a group." "Nature has endowed woman with more artificiality to probe

into and thrash out the artificial nature of a man." There are scores of such observations throughout the novel.

The author has himself admitted that he is tempted to place before the reader the vast knowledge and scholarhsip he acquired through his studies. He agreed that there is such a trend in the novel since it is his first attempt. That is the one reason why an average reader finds the novel boring as the author at many places thinks loudly, instead of concentrating on the narration of the story. I have myself heard readers—both men and women—complaining that the novel is a lengthy, terrible bore. A Swamiji's discourse on Gita and Hindu philosophy on the eve of the marriage of Dayanidhi, the author's lengthy discussion on the merits of the play "*Hamlet*" and the literary criticism it evoked including the one from the celebrated modern poet and critic, T. S. Eliot, and the chapter on Dayanidhi's treatment of Shyamala, a married girl with some psychosis seem unnecessary interpolations interfering with the course of the story. But to thinkers and literateures, they serve as food for thought. Intellectually they are more enjoyable. One saving grace in such situations is that the writer exhibits his sense of humour with his wit, satire and lighter vein references and makes the occasions enlivening.

Viewed in its totality, the novel published two decades ago, is a unique blend of intellect and aesthetic beauty produced by a competent artist-cum-thinker who seems to be bent on settling the scores with the contemporary society with all its ills and vices which are afflicting the youth of the day who are capable of developing individual consciousness. To be more frank, the novel contains something which one may call either depraving sex, vice, or immorality, or sin or defying established norms and taking to prohibited ways which have lured the human species right from the times of Adam and Eve and which still attract

their progeny to indulge in such pastimes. That is the one reason why some readers read certain titled chapters in the book repeatedly. But it is all an artistic and intellectual presentation, taking the raw material from contemporary life. As that renowned writer of prose fiction Dr. Mulk Raj Anand has recently observed, literature, specially the novel, cannot provide answer to the question "what is the meaning of life?" But it can create an awareness and a deeper insight into the problem. The stream of consciousness that flows through the pages of this novel has certainly created that awareness by deeper insight into the topic and the novelist deserves kudos for this splendid achievement.

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Balivada Kanta Rao

DAGAA PADINA TAMMUDU

[THE DECEIVED BROTHER]

Introduced by : **Vakati Panduranga Rao**

About the Novel :

Theme : the paradox of declining happiness as civilization advances.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : Naviri, a village near Visakhapatnam, on the banks of river Vamsadhaara ; 1940's.

Principal Characters :

PULLAYYA : a farmer.
NEELI : his wife.
MALLU : their son.
RAJANNA and others.

Year of Publication : 1961.

Editorial Note :

BALIVADA KANTA RAO (b. 1927) has brought to the Telugu novel a refreshing blend of idealistic aspiration and realistic detail. Though he is extremely naturalistic in his portrayal of life, his overall attitude is free from the flaws which usually vitiate naturalistic fiction. He asserts the simple dignity and the disarming candour of the rural milieu as against false urban values. Consequently, his fiction explores the uprooting of traditional, pastoral life as a result of the mass exodus of people to cities in search of gainful employment. The dislo-

cation of traditional occupations and the consequent disprution of familial and other social ties is a recurrent mode in his writing, as is evident in his novels Dagaa Padina Tammudu, Godamida Bomma *and* Punya Bhoomi. *Sri* K*anta Rao is also a gifted short story writer and his celebrated story "Dongalu" points out the failure of all legislative measures to rid society of the evil of drinking. As such it stands comparison with R. Viswanatha Sastri's "Aru Sara Kathalu". Sri Kanta Rao short stories are collected in* Kavadi Kundalu *(1951)* Antaratma *(1957) and other volumes.*

Dagaa Padina Tammudu *is an authentic portrayal of the changing patterns of rural life consequent upon the rapid pace of industrialization and growing political consciousness. Pullayya, the native son of the soil leading a harmonious life in tune with his rural surroundings is the victim of village politics. The dispossession of his land is only a prelude to the eventual disintegration of his life. He is thus a representative character symbolizing the countless number of farmers forced, due to the exigencies of socio-political imbalances, to the level not only of landless labour, but also, in an urban setting, of virtual beggars. The novel thus bocomes a significant fictional critique of the adverse effects of rapid politicization of rural life.*

Synopsis :

The village is Naviri on the banks of Vamsadhaara river in the northern part of Andhra Desa. Neelamma is the village deity and Ramudu, the barber turns into Dasudu completely devoted to the deity.

Pullayya is a happy-go-lucky farmer of the village tilling a bit of his own land and some taken on lease. Well-built and good-looking Pullayya is an *acrobat par excellence*. Seeing him perform his feats at the various festivals before the deity Neelamma is a thrilling experience to the men and women of Naviri. Peesa Narasimhulu is a fellow farmer.

Pullayya, the most eligible bachelor in the village is attracted by the vivacious Neeli. He pursues her and manages to catch her alone. But chastising him for his behaviour she runs away. With resoluteness Pullayya pursues the matter and through an

intermediary he fixes his marriage with Neeli. As man and wife when they are alone for the first time Pullayya learns the nobility and profound wisdom that are the foundations of Neeli's body and soul. Till then he only desired her for her physical charms, but now he starts respecting her for her individuality.

Ere long the couple are blessed with a son much to the excitement of Pullayya, who names the kid as Mallu after his father and dreams of the day when Mallu the acrobat will out-rank acrobat Pullayya.

Housewife Neeli shares her simple meal with the needy. She gives food to beggars like blind Venkanna and Gannemma even foregoing her own meal. Gannemma is a widow who lost whatever she had by trusting a cheat. Venkanna's is a different tale. Sooramma loves him but has to marry Errayya who has no children by his first wife. So divorcing his first wife the well-to-do Errayya marries Sooramma. Venkanna saves Errayya from a gang of thieves and earns the latter's gratitude. Errayya asks him to stay on in his house. This fosters the clandestine relationship between the former lovers Venkanna and Sooramma. When Sooramma delivers a boy (Rajanna) the village doubts his legitimacy. But the busy Errayya is not aware; or he does not care. Rajanna, when he grows up into a young man objects to these goings on under their roof, but to no avail. It is Rajanna's wife who forces the issue to its bitter end. Rajanna attacks the sleeping Venkanna, leaving him blind. Sooramma seeks Venkanna's pardon saying that Rajanna is blood of his blood. Blind Venkanna, on the roads, thinks it is all God's will and lives on alms.

Meanwhile village Naviri changes and changes fast. A hotel is eastablished. War Fund collections are made. Food scarcity and rationing follow. The price of foodgrain jumps up and up. The village merchant is making quick money. Procurement of foodgrain adds to the headaches of the small farmers. But the so-called elders of the village like Karanam Nayudu are making money on the sly.

In a village quarrel Pullayya intervenes on behalf of the poor Dasudu and incurs the wrath of Rajanna by calling him the

bastard son of blind Venkanna. Rajanna's wife vows to take revenge on Pullayya.

Pullayya refuses to give grain to the procurement authorities on the plea that after paying the rent and keeping aside for his own consumption he has actually no grain to spare. He is handcuffed and taken to Visakhapatnam. Peesa and Dasudu run there to get him out on bail. Rajanna's wife gives money to bail out Pullayya. The case keeps getting postponed and Pullayya's lawyer keeps sucking money. Pullayya has to mortgage his property to Rajanna for money. Mali, now two and a half year lad is very much attached to his father. Neeli saves a starved Dasudu by parting with her own meagre meal. Unable to make both ends meet by farming alone Pullayya tries his hand at selling rice. Matters get worse. Pullayya mortgages his land to Rajanna. The land that Pullayya has on lease changes hands and Rajanna buys it. Pullayya is filled with righteous but impotent rage. With lease land gone and own land under mortgage Pullayya, one day, swears that if anybody steps into his land he will kill him. The whole village is agog with excitement. With law on his side Rajanna succeeds in evicting an enraged Pullayya from his land.

Suddenly Pullayya loses his elan. Dasudu dies leaving deity Neelamma uncared for. Thefts are on the increase in the village. Venkanna is angry at the blatant injustice being meted out to a straightforward soul like Pullayya. A rice-mill is established in the village. Neeli's grand mother dies. Peesa Narasimhulu, the farmer, is caught stealing out of sheer hunger. Pullayya is shocked. He wonders if he too will be reduced to such a state one day; but he resolves that he will rather die than steal.

Pullayya, now half starving, goes to Visakhapatnam for getting Ademma treated. The city, to him, appears to be full of opportunities. He returns thinking of migrating to the city. Rajanna annexes Pullayya's house too towards the money due to him. And that is the proverbial last straw on the camel's back. Pullayya leaves the village with his son and wife for the city. Venkanna weeps saying "God too has become blind like me."

In the city Pullayya feels lost. He gets a single room in a slum area to live in. He cannot find a job. He is prepared to pull a rickshaw but the owner demands a deposit of Rs. 25 which Pullayya does not have. A starving Pullayya tries to pick a pocket in the Railway station and is caught and beaten. In the company of a similar suffering soul he attends some political meetings and hears some fiery speeches. He gets registered at the Employment Exchange and as per their advice removes his pride, his beautiful curly hair and goes to the interview with cropped hair, only to be rejected.

Elections come and Pullayya gets a temporary job, shouting slogans for one candidate Bangarayya. After a few days, Bangarayya loses the election and Pullayya is again on the roads. Pullayya steals money from the collection in front of a blind beggar; but next day when he earns a few annas he gives the beggar twice the amount. All along he hopes his son's future will be nothing but glorious. But fate wills otherwise. Pullayya is forced to join a gang of thieves, He bluffs to Neeli about the source of his income. "When one is starving there is no question of any morals" he now says. He gambles. Ultimately he is caught by the Police who are helped by none other than the innocent lad Mallu. Pullayya is convicted.

Convict Pullayya feels that it is Neeli who has brought him to such a pass; he is wild at her. But next minute he realises that Neell is a rare individual who has not forsaken the path of honesty and morals even in the darkest hour. She shines like the morning star on an otherwise dark horizon.

With two children hungry, a third one inside her, husband in jail and without a roof in that cruel city, Neeli is reduced to a state where she has no choice but to beg.

The 'brother' Pullayya is deceived in the village and his soul is killed by the city. And Neeli, who knows only to give has to seek alms!

Essay

> The five elements, Sky, Land, Air, Water, and Fire adhere to their *Dharma*. If man, who is but a compound of these elements discards his *Dharma* then, nothing can save him or his world. When you tread the path of *Adharma*—even when the stake is your own life—you are not deceiving anybody save your own self.

In these words, a fellow convict sums up his belief to Pullayya the hero (the deceived) of Balivada Kanta Rao's novel *Dagaa Padina Tammudu*. This eternal truth is novelist Kanta Rao's credo and keeps appearing in all his works.

In the Telugu literary world of today, literature that is not committed to the leftist politico-economic viewpoint is suspect and dubbed as escapist. These dons of 'committed literature' seem to ignore a basic truth that the success of even a revolutionary or leftist cause ultimately depends upon the integrity of the individual.

Integrity of the individual! A clean, honest man devoted to the good of all, to the elimination of all evil, a total man who is nearer Gods than beasts, a man who is the ultimate in the evolutionary process-it is such a man that Kanta Rao envisages in his work.

Yes, it is commitment, commitment with a vegeance, to an ideal that defies the limitations of political and economic theories which keep changing with time and place.

If man is made up of the five elements, then it must follow that man is at his possible best nearer Nature which is similarly made up. The hamlet, the village, where the land blossoms, where the seed germinates, where the song of man mingles with that of the birds is probably where Nature wants man to live, next to her, nurturing her and being nursed by her.

The commotion over the 'environmental pollution' that is being cnrrently raised in all the industrialized countries, the growing concern over the ecological balance being upset, the cry for a 'return to Nature,' the big question mark facing the mater-

ially well-provided man—all these only go to prove that nearer Nature man can be; away from Nature and upsetting its order ('rita') and breaking *Dharma*, happiness, as the only true and ideal state of man, cannot be and so, man ceases to be. That precisely is the theme of this deeply moving novel.

Pullayya is a real son of the soil. Well-built, with flowing hair, he is the cynosure of all eyes in his village. As an acrobat, performing at the festivals and *Poojas*, he has no peer. This happy-go-lucky farmer weds Neeli, the girl of his choice. Their very first meeting when he tries to grab her, a maiden and restraining him she goes away shows the contrast in their personalities. If Pullayya is like a raging river, Nelli is akin to the two banks of the river. Not literate, but profoundly wise, soft in word and generous in deed Neeli epitomizes the ideal womanhood.

Tilling his land, reaping its harvest and basking in the love and attention of his wife Neeli, Pullayya's sole wish is to have a son who will outdo him at acrobatics. The son arrives. Deliriously happy Pullayya names him Mallu, after his own father.

But then the *sukla paksham*, the bright fortnight of Pullayya's life, is over. The fortnight of gathering darkness begins. And paradoxically it is the attainment of India's Independence that almost marks the decline in the fortunes of Pullayya. Politics, the last refuge of scoundrels, starts corrupting the village life. Scarcity, rationing, procurement, rice-mill, hotel, black-market—all these signs of post-independent civilization of India enter Pullayya's village very fast. He, a simple man who knows only to sweat and earn his honest bread, is dazed by the fast pace of change. His mood is reflected by a character who says: "He who is just is respected no more, it is he with money that commands respect."

Unable to make both ends meet Pullayya is forced to incur debts. He tries mortgaging his land only to lose it for ever. He loses his cattle and his house too. A series of developments lead Pullayya, his wife and son to leave the village. He, its child, is forced to migrate to the city to seek his daily bread. The act of migration itself is tragic, for here is an innocent man jumping

from the frying pan into the fire. Pullayya's departure from village is commented by blind beggar Venkanna thus: "The God, He is merciless, He has become blind like me."

Once in the city the fall of Pullayya is swift.

The crowd, the heartlessness, the impersonal relationships, the cruelty, the slums, the stink—all that constitutes a city are at work and poor Pullayya is no match. One day, out of sheer hunger and desperation he tries picking a pocket and is beaten mercilessly. What a fall for a proud man who had earlier vowed that he would rather starve to death than do a wrong thing!

Within a few days again, the unemployed Pullayya is forced to pick up a one-anna coin from the collections spread before a blind beggar-woman. But the next day when he earns four annas a penitent Pullayya gives away two annas to the old woman. (He parts with the other two annas for a bit of fortune telling that promises a glorious future to his boy.) Then come the elections and for some time Pullayya and his family are well-fed. Once the farc is over, Pullayya is again on the road with gnawing hunger as his constant companion.

From petty thefts to organized gang-thievery is a logical step. Pullayya plunges into it almost like the hero of a Greek Tragedy. The long arm of law reaches him. That Pullayya's capture by the police should be facilitated by the innocent lad Mallu (on whom Pullayya literally dotes) is one of those quirks of fate. Pullayya is put behind the bars, by the law which does not care if you had eaten a meal in the past ten days or not, but promptly jails you for stealing a meal; the law that does not touch a man who steals a million meals and calls it business, but is ever ready to punish a man for stealing a loaf of bread.

Neeli's monumental patience is repeatedly tested. But with the steadfastness of an epic heroine she resists all evil and, even in utter poverty and stink, she holds her head high and her ideals untarnished. Even when her beloved is in the dock her values do not do a somersault. Her concepts of good and evil are as eternal as the sun and the moon.

But even if the spirit is willing the flesh is weak. With her husband in jail, two children starving, a third one inside her, no roof over the head and with none to offer solace, Neeli, who throughout her life is accustomed only to 'give and give till it hurts, is at last forced to beg on the roadside. The hand that gave away willingly is reduced to seeking alms.

When Neeli is reduced to begging, my friends, it is you, me and our society, our laws, our constitution and its high-sounding directives, our pompous leaders and their so-called plans—that are being questioned, indicted and impeached.

Have we, ladies and gentlemen, any answer ?

I am afraid not.

Change the names in this moving tale of a Telugu farmer, it could be from any part of the country. It is an accusing finger at the gap between our professions and practices.

This novel operates at two levels : man and his steady alienation from Nature ; the ganging up of vested interests which have brought the country to such a pass today. Kanta Rao builds up his theme gradually but surely, in his characteristic way. The manner in which the story is told is simple and warm, though it tends to be a trifle syrupy at times.

To go back to an incident in the novel : Pullayya is about to lose his land to the mortgagee. It is all wrong says Pullayya and in a fit of righteous anger he threatens to kill anybody who so much as sets foot in his field. Coming from Pullayya the he-man of the village it is no empty threat. But the other fellow is clever enough to have the so-called law and the 'elders' on his side. The whole village is agog with fear and excitement over the morrow's expected confrontation. Pullayya goes home, does not say a thing to Neeli, then she asks him" "The whole village knows it, then why hide it from me ?"

"I am not afraid of the village" says Pullayya.

It is the weakness of brute force against the strength of a moral principle. It is what made a fragile-looking Gandhi shake

the very foundations of the vast vast British empire. The meek, said the Lord, shall, inherit the earth and here is Kanta Rao saying 'amen' to it.

Guddi (Blind) Venkanna, Rajigadu, Sooramma, Ademmappa, Chandrayya, Peesa Narsimhulu, Bangarayya—the list of live men and women who make the tale a pulsating one, is endless. Kanta Rao draws heavily by way of form and content from his native region of Srikakulam and one is grateful to him for the many-splendoured picture of a Telugu village that he presents.

Judged by any standards *Dagaa Padina Tammudu* is an outstanding piece of modern Telugu fiction. That the National Book Trust, India, has chosen to render this novel into the fourteen other languages of the country only underscores this obvious fact.

♣

Bina Devi | HANG ME QUICK

Introduced by : **A. Muralidhar**

About the Novel :

Theme : Exploitation of the working class in a semi-feudal society.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : Visakhapatnam; the present.

Principal Characters :

SIMHACHALAM : the protagonist.

RAJAMMA : his wife.

J. J. : an American business man.

GAVARRAJU : a contractor.

Year of Publication : 1971.

Editorial Note :

BINA DEVI (b. 1935) is one of the significant writers to emerge with an authentic, individual voice of her own in the Telugu fiction of the sixties. When most Telugu novels tended to be either escapist fantasies (usually written with the film potentialities as the decisive criterion) or sentimental family tales with a suitably diluted dose of 'permissiveness', Bina Devi stuck to the ruthlessly real aspects of life. She exhibits, as a result, an unblinking eye for the anomalies and contradistinctions of contemporary existence allied with a mature perspective on life. Though there is the perceptible influence of Sri Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastry on her vision and design, her fiction cannot in any sense be regarded as derivative. This is evident in the style, both linguistic and aesthetic, she has structured for herself. Astringent without being sardonic or bitter, ironic contemplation is her forte. Consequently, there is a refreshing

blend, in her fiction, of humanistic sympathy with aesthetic detachment. Bina Devi retains her distinction even in the genre of the short story: she has several collections to her credit, such as Radhamma Pelli Agi Poindi *and* First Case.

In Hang Me Quick, *Bina Devi succeeds in freeing Telugu fiction from thematic slavery to the middle class life. In keeping with the democratization of thematic material, she chooses a working class hero as her protagonist and finds in his apparently uneventful life enough dramatic potentialities for an intensely moving novel. The signal triumph of the novel is, however, one of deft characterization: Bina Devi shows in this regard craft of a very high order.*

Synopsis :

Simhachalam is a working-class non-hero caught in the grim struggle for survival in a society which is still smacking of feudalism. The cess pool of the moneylender, the lawyer, his touts and the courts with their shady characters in the corridors is a fit setting in the sense that it is the replica of the living exploitation where justice is what justice is made out to be.

Simhachalam (and his tribe for that matter) have no other choice but to fall into the booby trap of a contractor like Gavarraju who knows it too well that the victim cannot but perish. Venkat Rao (and lawyers like him) provide all the material for the successful exploitation and they in turn make a living by the spoils of the wicked game.

Rajamma stands by her husband very faithfully till the very end. Life continues to be merciless and when Simhachalam falls on evil days and becomes a burden than support to the family, she too drifts. She first becomes a victim to her needs and then submits herself readily to the needs of others like the principal in whose household she has been working. As it happened she is again caught in a crime she did not commit, that is the murder of the principal's wife.

When she visits her home, her husband too suspects her of all the crimes and she is shocked. In fact, there is no end to

the shocks. There is no sure ground on which she could stand and call her own.

It is at this stage that she abandons all and joins a house of ill-fame and one of her customers is J. J. J. J. is an American businessman who is suffering from a guilt-complex and he comes down to India and stays in the Ashram of a Guru. But he finds no solution or consolation and friend's advice, drifts again and Rajamma is the last of his victims.

He ends his life and Rajamma is predicatably charged with his murder based on the circumstantial evidence. The disillusionment is complete and she is beyond redemption.

That is the reason why when the American journalist slyly offers a fortune to her for her story, she readily refuses it by requesting him to arrange for getting her hanged quick.

Incidentally, *Hang Me Quick* is the title of the novel. The comment is very real. Victims like Rajamma have no redemption in a society bent on expliotation of the under-dog.

As suggested in the 'afterword', by the author, it is not important whether she is hanged or not. What is important is that simple folk like Rajamma and Simhachalam are driven like mad dogs on the street. It is society that stinks and the malady is not just personal. It just does not end up with a bad taste nor is it enough to shed a tear. Behind every tear there should be a powerful thought which should awaken every one in this country. And the novelist fondly hopes that that day will soon come.

When the reader puts down the work, he has no doubt about it. Forget the political overtones, but the feeling is genuine and the agony for the have-nots is very much real. The novel clearly brings out this and Rajamma's death is the death of belief in the basic goodness of man. But the fond hope that something very powerful emerges out of it is clear.

Essay :

Discussion of a contemporary Telugu novel has certain serious limitations, as the novel as genre is international and the Indian novel cannot but be exposed to the creative explosion if it wants to be in it. But when one is called upon to discuss a contemporary novel written in a regional language, the scope is in a way confined to the study of the novels in that particular language.

Thus the critic's field of operation is beset with a fundamental problem. While it should not rob the essential element with which we are more concerned, it is necessary for us to be aware of thc seeming pitfalls in such a mini-adventure.

It is not necessary to talk about the various channels of thought and experimentation that are vigorously pursued in English and other languages on the continent and elsewhere for the purpose of this review. Suffice would it be if the achievement of the Telugu novel is surveyed with particular reference to the work under review. It is equally relevant to examine the trends that have evolved in the process.

When scores of novels are written by amateurs, semi-mature and immature authors who can hardly claim to have a style of their own or have any point to make, it is difficult, if not impossible, to pick up one work from the quagmire and hail it.

But all creative work in the final analysis is and should be exposed to critical evaluation.

From such a heap of fictitious fiction, there is a solid core which peeps out claiming our attention and very rightly so. Bina Devi's *Hang Me Quick*, it must be said in all fairness, falls into this category.

One may wonder as to why this particular work of fiction should demand our critical attention. We have to examine various factors before we come to some valid conclusions. Whether it qualifies for a place by virtue of its theme, plot or style, besides or irrespective of the idealogical contribution. As

novel is considered a social document of the time, the message could be implied or explicit. While the former has greater intellectual and ethical validity, the latter has social acceptability and relevance. The reformative nature of the novel, as it happens in a novelist of lesser calibre, has a tendency to fall into the abyss of pamphleteering. That this novel has escaped that fate should serve as a compliment to the novelist.

Hang Me Quick is the first major work of the author, and in a way it is also her considerable work on a wider canvas. Her medium has hitherto been short story, a genre in which she has written some really good pieces. Mention must be made of 'Thanks for the P.M.' and 'A Matter of No Importance.' Her graduation to the front rank Telugu novelists with her very first novel should not surprise us.

The setting is Andhra Pradesh, still smacking of the feudal system, the professional leech of a money-lender and a band of exploiters usually found in the shady corridors of the local courts.

Simhachalam is a working-class non-hero who is caught in the web of crucifying situations from time to time. He is young but turned prematurely grey saddled with the woes not uncommon to a worker. His wife, Rajamma, who evolves as the principal victim in the novel is no heroine either, in the traditional sense, though she submits herself to the endless often meaningless harrassment by her insipid husband. She is earthy, virile and tolerable beyond moderation. Gavarraju, a contractor who is so naturally a trickster finds Simhachalam a ready bait for his game. Venkatrao, a lawyer who could not make an honorable living by his profession is taken care of by Gavarraju who sees in him the spark igniting it only to serve his purpose. The lawyer has had the bitter taste of hunger and deprivation and readily submits himself to the wiles of the contractor.

In a society caught in the criss-cross currents of depravity, everyone is sold out long before the actual call or fall comes to him. The fall is so complete that only an occasion must be provided for him. Thus, hunger is the theme and human deprivation and systematic exploitation is the rule and the methods

are obvious. Every victim chooses his own end and rushes to it with studied pathos. The brutality is explainable only in terms of the total context of the situations he is forced into.

The comment here is more sociological and no doubt the individuals unwittingly participate in the gory drama of meaningless self-annihilation. In a larger sense, the persons become only tools enacting a scene of planned tragedy leading to its inescapable culmination. The tragedy thus enacts itself. The characters are important no doubt but become incidental.

The plot holds no surprises as such. It is well planned and executed with care. Bina Devi makes no departure from the traditional plot-making.

One point about the style. It is racy, readable and retains the flavour of the local dialect of Visakhapatnam and Vijayanagaram districts. But the influence of Rachakonda Viswanatha Sastry, a celebrity in the field of modern Telugu short story writing, is found to a discernable degree. It would have had a devastating effect in a novelist of mediocrity-which lucidly the novelist is not-but this remains definitely a moot point.

If Rachakonda has influenced Bina Devi, she in her turn has influenced many others. Telugu novel has never been the same thematically and in point of style. No longer is the novel confined to the kitchen or drawing room or to the elite or to the upper or lower middle-class families.

Hitherto, Telugu novel has confined itself to the wiles of the middle class families, their impotent will and the silent misery they undergo, hardly raising their voice beyond the nose. Gopichand's *Asamarthuni Jeevayatra* is a beginning of the problem of the futility of a do-gooder, an ineffectual bogey of a man beyond reform and redumption. *Alpajeevi* by Rachakonda is a full-blooded work depicting lives of victims caught in the game of exploitation by a feudal society. We see the seedlings of *Hang Me Quick* in *Alpajeevi*. An important novelist though with limited capability in the craft is late Buchi Babu. His *Chivaraku Migiledi* though misses being a masterpiece still retains

the germs of it. While Unnava's *Malapalli* has a thematic significance, Kodavatiganti Kutumba Rao's novels fail to touch the high water mark of perfection. He emerges as a many-sided craftsman one overlapping the other. One wonders as to when the political pamphleteering ends and the narrative begins. But it is again Chalam who is an unparalleled master of Telugu prose.

It is thus refreshing to see Bina Devi emerging as a major Telugu novelist with a contemporarily valid theme and a style to match it. She has reached the next mile and by all standards it is sure to leave an imprint on others.

It is possible to have certain criteria when one tries to understand and evaluate a work of this magnitude. Whether the novel in question stands the test of the complex craft of fiction? It should in the first place break the language barrier—that is the basic question (translatabilty). Whether it has scope and meaning extending beyond the locale though faithfully confining itself to the place (universality). Whether it can hold out the truth beyond a limited time, though restricting itself to the period in which it is written and belonging to it (contemporaneity vis-a-vis timelessness).

Thus, only a genuine work of fiction being confined to the limits of language, place and time should be in a position to stand out distinctly. Though this is rather exacting evaluation, this seems to be the very nearly acceptable measuring-rod of literary evaluation. This has, however, little to do with the popularity or otherwise of the book.

While a popular work of fiction may be readable and sustain the interest of the reader—a very general way of looking at it—a genuine work of fiction more often than not, passes this primary test. Its creative validity in no case depends upon those creteria though. It could only be correlated to a certain extent but need not be of conclusive relevance.

The narrative is rather too contrived at some places, very specially the introduction of J. J. J. J. is an American businessman caught in a guilt complex. He tries to find solace at the

feet of a '*Guru*' drifts again and falls for a society lady and ends up with Rajamma. His disillusionment is complete. The ending is unambiguous. It leads to the total fall of Rajamma both from the grace of the society and from her husband. She only waits for liberation by quick death. So, when the foreign journalist makes a proposal to buy her story for his magazine for a fantastic price thereby also slyiy suggesting that it may buy her freedom, she flatly refuses it by requesting him to recommend for immediate redemption—'Hang me quick'. Even when she drifts, she does so out of human consideration. The evolution of Rajamma's character provokes deeper study. She is a housewife, true and faithful to her husband and when she departs from her usual and true self, we are bound to feel that it is obvious in the given circumstances. She allows herself to be embarrassed, used and harrassed but when the breaking point arises, she does not act with sadism or vengeance. If the work compels our study, it is solely because of Rajamma.

A word about the 'afterword'. A fond hope emerging out of the grim tragedy of exploitation of man by man is provided by the author in the 'afterword'. Though it has political overtones, the basic sincerety and agony cannot be minimised. She does not mince words but proclaims, as in a political pamphlet, the shape of things to come according to her. At a time when there is so much talk of 'commitment', this should not ofcourse be totally out of place !

One swallow does not make summer no doubt, but volume has never proved anything! The trend is towards anti-hero, probably leading to anti-literature, and *Hang Me Quick* by Bina Devi is not only a good augury for a literature that is involved or even pathological but it cannot in any case be blamed as lacking the power that compels us to turn our insipid and invalid wills and reexamine in its entirety. Awakening social conscience is no small achievement and that this novel makes an honest attempt is a feather in its cap. The reason why this writer has not proclaimed after reading this novel, 'Oh, look, Telugu novel has come of age!' it is not only because, he does not believe in speaking in superlatives but also because that literary standards are set on a much more difficult terrain. With this Bina Devi

joins the rank of major novelists and very rightly so. There is a fresh breath of relief at the end. That Rajamma finds her liberation by eternal damnation is well etched and that the tragedy is not personal or personalised is again a sociological comment.

A society bereft of any values has nothing to uphold except its monstrous tenets. A work like *Hang Me Quick* needs much more than a casual reading to get this message. It also leaves us with little doubt that a work of this quality and magnitude should not be confined to the language in which it is originally written.

*

G. V. Krishna Rao

KEELU BOMMALU

[MARIONETTES]

Introduced by : **G. Sundara Ramaiah**

About the Novel :

Theme : the predicament of an individual caught in the conflict between conscience and cupidity.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : any average village in Andhra ; the present.

Principal Characters :

PULLAYYA : the village chief.
LAKSHMAMMA : his wife.
RAMA RAO : his son.
CHANDRASEKHAR : a teacher.
LALITA : his wife.
SITA : his daughter.
KRISHNA : a doctor.
AMMAYAMMA : a social worker.

Year of Publication : 1952.

Editorial Note :

G. V. KRISHNA RAO (b. 1914) is a versatile figure in contemporary Telugu literature. A distinguished scholar, at home in both Indian and Western cultural and aesthetic traditions, he has enriched several fields of literary art with his original contribution. He is not only a talented novelist but also a gifted poet and

essayist. Above all, he is a scintillating critic and his Studies in Kalapurnodaya *(1956) for which he received Ph. D. from the University of Madras, remains a significant contribution to Telugu literary criticism. His writings include* Chaitrarатham, Yugasandhya, Jegantalu *and* Varuthini.

KEELU BOMMALU *reveals another facet of Sri Krishna Rao's irrepressible creativity: his fictional art. Written with authenticity and elegance, the novel achieves significant level of naturalness of theme and structure. Though the story stems from a single act of apparent indiscretion, it moves with a relentless aesthetic logic of its own and exhibits the muddled and unpredictable nature of rural life and politics. In this regard the novel is a triumph as much of sharply drawn characters as of the deeper implications of its apparently simple content.*

Synopsis :

Pullayya, a well-to-do farmer, is a good friend of Chandrasekhar. Chandrasekhar marries Lalita, the only daughter of a rich man and becomes rich thereby. He establishes a paper mill without any technical know-how and runs into debts. He faces non-cooperation from his workers and as a result of that he suffers heavy losses. But his zeal to keep the mill going forces him to borrow money from various people in the village. Pullayya used to lend money on previous occassions to Chandrasekhar. But having come to know that Chandrasekhar was running into debts he just stands as a surety between Chandrasekhar and a Marwadi. This fact is kept confidential since Pullayya is afraid of his wife who virtually runs the family and its money-lending business. Therefore, he does not want to reveal to his wife the fact that he stood as a surety to Chandrasekhar.

The story takes a twist here and assumes the form of a confrontation between good and bad, virtue and vice, Idealism and Pragmatism.

Pullayya wants to deny that he stood as a surety to Chandrasekhar. As a result of this his inner-voice is killed and he puts on the garb of a pseudo-gentleman of modern society. He begins to collect evidence from various people in support of his

case. He seeks the help of prominent citizens of the village to tell in a court of law that he never stood as a surety to Chandrasekhar. Had he told this matter to his wife, his personal prestige with his wife would have been at stake. If he does not reveal he has to shell down the money for which he has to account to his wife. This is his dilemma. Added to this the socio-political set up of the village tempts Pullayya to eliminate Chandrasekhar from the scene who has already gained some popularity in that village. So he nurtures a plan to take Chandrasekhar to a court on the grounds of forgery.

At this stage Pullayya's son, Rama Rao, returns from the town after completing his studies. Having no job he runs a small newspaper. As he has to collect material for his paper he renews friendship with some of his old acquaintances in the village and comes to know the tension prevailing in the village. Immediately he confronts his father and persuades him not to proceed against Chandrasekhar. But Pullayya implicates Chandrasekhar not only in the forgery case but also in a criminal case. In this confrontation Pullayya comes out in his true colours.

Since Sri Rao wrote the novel immediately after independence it reflects the ideological conflict that existed and still exists between Communism and Congress. The son is shown to be a committed Communist and the father as a Congressman. In their confrontation the son threatens the father that he will reveal to the police all his father's misdeeds. Not able to convince his son, the father accuses him as a Communist and requests the authorities to arrest his son so that peace can be restored in the village. The police arrest the son and sentence him to jail.

In the absence of his son, who is a powerful opponent to him,Pullayya manages to get more evidence and proceeds against Chandrasekhar criminally and at the end Chandrasekhar is sent to jail.

The innocent villagers thought that Pullayya was a 'Dharmadata' and they express their desire that a portrait of Pullayya should be univeiled by a minister. In the function Pullayya donates five hundred rupees to the family of Chandrasekhar only to show that he is innocent.

Pullayya was awarded with the title 'Sardar Pullayyya'.

Essay :

Thinking, decision making and action are the nerves of human life. These may be good or bad. The achievements of human life revolve around these. The characters in the novel vividly dipict this. While the characters of Pullaiah, Mallaiah, Ammayamma succeed, Rama Rao and Satyanarayana fail to achieve anything.

The meaning of the novel can be construed in two ways. First, that man is a puppet in the hands of circumstances and environment. Second, that man is guided by his fate and destiny. Mr. G.V. Krishna Rao tends to believe the first one. It is his effort to show that all human beings are in a dilemma with some degree of difference. Circumstances over which man has no control and activities which are beyond human effort also exist. But the activity of a man should extend to grasp these in an effort to have control over them. Man may fail or succeed in his effort. This is the essence of the novel.

Shri G.V. Krishna Rao at the very outset points out that the novel is not a love story, not a moral story, not a political episode. There is striking evidence that he is under the influence of the writings of philosophers like Nietzsche,K afka, Heidigger, Croce, Marx, Hegel and Sartre. These philosophers advocated a kind of philosophy which is primarily concerned with the activity of human being. According to them, man is a bundle of emotions and a bunch of nervous system which are almost controlled by his conscious behaviour. Since man is a self-conscious being, and as he has a highly developed faculty of thinking, he alone can think and can take decisions for himself. He acts according to these decisions. His decisions condition his behaviour. Therefore man alone is responsible for his destiny (p. 23).

Idealism, realism, and fatalism fade away before this kind of philosophy which keeps man at the centre of the universe. There is always an ideological conflict among these philosophies. It is the purpose of this novel to show how best one can reconcile these conflicting attitudes towards life.

Pullaiah,the principal character, is in an existential dilemma. He stands as a surety to Mr. Chandrasekhar when he borrows

some money from a Marwadi. Being a hen-pecked husband he did not want that matter to be known to his wife, since his personal prestige is involved. The existentialists give importance to Ego, which involves I and Me. The Ego of Pullaiah overshadows the inferiority of the pre-reflective consciousness. Hence he does not hesitate to bluff.

The subsequent story of the novel is structured to justify the existential dilemma of Pullaiah. Pullaiah gathers witnesses in favour of his decision.

The political atmosphere in the novel is mainly concerned with the activities of village life. Elementary ideas of democracy and socialism are discussed (p.85). Mr. Rao says that the village folk often forget that they have a discursive reasoning faculty and are generally swayed away by emotions (p.86). The village environment is described as a polluted one with factionalism, groupism, lack of understanding each other and above all casteism (p.87). In such an environment, we are told, the weaker man will generally suffer at the hands of the stronger one. This general truth becomes evident as we read through the pages of the novel.

Mr. Rama Rao, another character and son of Pullaiah is charged with enthusiasm and idealism. Concepts such as *Satyam, Dharmam, Paramartham,* reshape themselves as duty and appear in existential philosophy. Shri G.V. Krishna Rao takes advantage of these concepts and experiments this idea with the character of Rama Rao (p.109). Confronted with the problem of filial obedience and his duty to the cause of natural justice we find Rama Rao also in an existential dilemma.

Mr. Rao describes the village-political environment (1947-51) in bitter terms. Communists are described as terrorists. Looting, murders and police firing are described as the order of the day (p.128). Communists are accused as *Desadrohulu, Gundas* and *Viplavakarulu,* while Congressmen and Congress party are recognised as symbols of sacrifice and chastity (p. 129).

Pullaiah takes advantage of this polluted political environment. He hatches a master plan to gather evidence in

favour of himself and to wipe out the evidence which is against him. His only son, Rama Rao is against him. Pullaiah being aware of this does not hesitate to dub his son as a Communist and hands him over to the police as a Communist detenue. With this he completely wipes out all the evidence which is against him. He does not hesitate to adopt corrupt practices under the cloak of charities and donations to the ashrams. A conflict of ideology between ego and interior consciousness is shown in these two characters (p.179).

Ammayamma, a social worker runs an ashram with the help of charities and donations which she receives from Pullaiah, Mallaiah and many others. She supports the cause of Pullaiah just for the sake of money. Mallaiah another character who is a potential rival to Pullaiah also supports Pullaiah through Amayamma. All these characters are shown as lumps of selfishness. Pullaiah wins the case against Chandrasekhar. He is sentenced to jail on a forgery case.

Taking the victory of Pullaiah as an advantage, Ammayamma wants to honour Pullaiah in a public meeting. She seeks the support of Mallaiah for this. He readily agrees. They decide to honour Pullaiah by getting his portrait unveiled by a Minister. Mallaiah should garland Pullaiah and the Minister and submit a memorandum to the minister. With great care the plan is executed. The minister is made to believe that Pullaiah is a *Dharmamurti*, and a *Dharmadata* and also a *Dhanyajivi* (pp,284-298). The minister conferred the title "Sardar Pullaiah" on Pullaiah in spite of his covert behaviour.

The aim of the novel is to show that such things are not uncommon even today.

*

Unnava Lakshmi-narayana

MALAPALLI

[HARIJAN GHETTO]

Introduced by : **D. Anjaneyulu**

About the Novel :

Theme : the regeneration and uplift of the 'untouchables'.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : early 1920's; a village in the Andhra region.

Principal Characters :

RAMADAS : head of a Harijan family.

MAHALAKSHMAMMA : his wife.

VENKATADAS, SANGADAS and RANGADU : his sons.

JYOTI : his daughter.

APPA DAS : a Harijan boy working in his house, in love with his daughter.

CHOUDARAYYA : head of a high caste (Kamma) family of landowners.

LAKSHMAMMA : his wife.

VENKATAYYA : his adopted son.

RAMA NAIDU : his own son.

KAMALA : wife of Rama Naidu.

MOHAN RAO : a cousin of Rama Naidu.

Year of Publication : 1922.

Editorial Note :

UNNAVA LAKSHMINARAYNA (1877–1958) is one of the founders of the tradition of the novel in Telugu. His achievement is seminal in at least two respects: in giving social content and relevance to fiction and in moulding an easy, natural idiom eminently suited to the art of the novel. An active nationalist and committed social reformer, Sri Unnava brought to bear on the novel his felt experience of rural life in all its diversity. And even before Gandhi's Harijan movement had its pervasive impact, Sri Unnava saw in the upliftment of the lower classes the vital clue to national regeneration. It is out of this firm conviction regarding the vital role of the lower classes in any programme of social advancement that he created one of the most memorable characters in Telugu fiction: Ramadas, the protagonist of Malapalli. *In addition to this novel, Sri Unnava also wrote* Life of Akbar *(1906),* Nayakuralu *(drama, 1907) and* India Rajya Tantramu *(political treatise).*

Malapalli *is a classic in Telugu fiction for more than one reason: it naturalized fiction and brought it close to felt life. In a period when "noveles" were mere adaptations from English or Bengali or sterile narratives of an exotic past,* Malapalli *revolutionized the content of the Telugu novel. In its protagonist* Malapalli *may be said to be unique: he belongs neither to the upper or the middle classes but to the class which is usually either ignored or portrayed only tangentially. By making his hero represent the most insistently exploited class in India. Sri Unnava struck at the root of thematic conservatism to which Telugu fiction undoubtedly clung until then. Moreover, the sympathy and understanding that the novelist brings to bear upon the Harijan community reflects not only his own imperviousness to the caste system but also anticipates the secular temper in which alone a society can function meaningfully. Thus the novel may be regarded as one of the earlist to free Telugu fiction from rigidities of theme and language.*

Synopsis :

Though an untouchable by birth and a villager (living in the Harijan ghetto), Ramadas is a man of culture and refinement. He lives a happy and contented life on his small plot of land with his wife and children. Philosophical by temperament and religious by family tradition he spends his spare time in discoursing on the teachings of holy men. His family is an example of obedience and harmony.

Choudarayya, the leading landlord of village Mangalapuram, is conscious of his social status (as a member of a high-caste) as well as of his wealth. He is greedy and callous. He is not very happy about his son, Rama Naidu, fraternising too closely with Sangadas, son of Ramadas. He wants that each one should know his place and keep it at all cost.

The two young men, however, go ahead in their campaign for education and social reform. They also work for safeguarding the rights of farm workers against the inroads of the landlords. There arises some friction on the issue of the wages of the workers, when the landlords refuse to pay in kind and a strike follows as a result. In the confrontation that ensues, Sangadas, who tries to intervene on behalf of the workers, succumbs to the blows of Choudarayya. The latter's crime is hushed up with the complicity of local officials and by the use of bribes for the higher-ups.

Shocked by this murder. Ramadas derives some consolation from his son's memory perpetuated in the founding of a school for the untouchables with the active cooperation of Rama Naidu. But this is not the end of the troubles of Ramadas. Choudarayya would not let him live in peace. With the connivance of Revenue officials, he manages to evict Ramadas from his land. Ramadas and his family find themselves thrown on the streets. He is forced to work as a common labourer.

Venkatadas, the eldest son of Ramadas, unable to withstand the injustice done to his father, turns a rebel. Under an assumed name (Takkella Jagannadham or Jaggadu), he organises a gang of robbers, plundering the rich and supporting the poor all over the land, in the manner of a latter-day Robinhood.

Because of his blood relation with the robber leader, Ramadas and the rest of his family are taken in custody and kept under surveillance in a "settlement" for criminal tribes. A crooked man named Paul, working under a Christian Padre at the settlement, carts his eyes on Jyoti. To escape his overtures on the river bank, she jumps into the waters and is carried away by the stream. Her lover, Appadas, coming to know of this, also takes the plunge, following her to a watery grave.

It is not as if Choudarayya is able to enjoy family happiness, after doing his utmost to make the life of Ramadas miserable. Kamala, his daughter-in-law (wife of Rama Naidu) elopes with her husband's cousin, Mohan Rao, to Madras. There she and her new born babe have a tragic end in the small-pox epidemic. Some time later, Lakshmamma dies, followed by her husband Choudarayya.

The government, agitated by the escapades of the gang o robbers, lay a trap for Jaggadu. Coming to know of this he decides to fight it out. In the encounter that ensues, he is seriously wounded and captured. He is tried and sentenced and dies in custody. His mother succumbs to the shock of this tragedy.

A new educational institution is started at the village with the funds left by Venkata Das alias Jaggadu. This is to help the cause of country's freedom and the uplift of Harijans. Mohan Rao, now repentent and dedicated to national service, wills away all his property to it in the last days of his fatal disease. At this hour of fulfilment, on the road of suffering, Ramadas, gives up all mundane affairs for a life in the forest.

Essay :

The Telugu novel has already completed its first hundred years. There was some controversy over the chronological precedence to be given to this work or that entitling it to a place of honour as the first Telugu novel. It matters little in terms of intrinsic literary merit if one or two novels, now little known and less appreciated, were actually written or published earlier

than the first work in this field by Veeresalingam. His *Rajasekhara Charitra* has a unique place as a trend-setter. An equally significant trendsetter was *Maalapalli* by Unnava Lakshminarayana. In some ways, it is even more significant. It is to modern Telugu fiction what Gurazada Appa Rao's *Kanyasulkam* is to modern Telugu drama.

This novel was first published in 1922, from which we could surmise that the author must have written it at least a year or so earlier. It is lengthy, running to over 600 pages in print. Even the manual process of writing it should have taken the author some months. Though there is no specific mention of the Indian freedom movement in the text, it is obviously written against this background, as would be evident from many indirect references. Impressions of a world tired of imperialist wars and individual countries hungering for freedom and peace could also be traced behind some of the observations of the main characters of the story.

The theme, which is that of national regeneration, through political liberation and social reform, is one of the boldest that could be chosen by any novelist of the day. The author, Unnava Lakshminarayana, a barrister and Telugu scholar, who was among the earliest in Andhra to respond to the Mahatma's call of non-violent non-cooperation, was deeply committed to the values implicit in the choice of this theme. He propagated them no less by example than by precept. In contemporary parlance, he could be described as a 'committed' writer. He was prepared to pay the price for his convictions and did, in fact, pay it.

Maalapalli is a strikingly realistic novel. It is in the best tradition of the realistic novels of the 19th century—those of George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and others, minute in its descriptions, leisurely in its pace. It is sometimes pointed out, as a left-handed compliment, that its author was inspired by a reading of Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne*. It might be true that he was inspired by the technique, but it would not detract from the originality of its theme and its treatment. There is an authenticity about both of them. The characters and the locale are equally authentic.

The novel is divided into four parts. The first depicts mainly the story of Ramadas, the head of the Harijan (untouchable) family, who is the main character of the story. and also the only character who is there from the beginning to the end. The second is mainly the story of the family of the caste-Hindu landlord, Choudarayya. (He could be taken for the conventional villain if Ramadas could be treated as the conventional hero. But, really there is neither conventional hero nor conventional villain as such in this novel). The third part deals with the life at the criminal settlement, where Ramdas is obliged to live by force of circumstances. The fourth is devoted to a description of Ramadas's jail life. The Robinhood escapades of his eldest son, Venkatadas,and his tragic end are covered in the last two parts. The death of his second son, Sangadas, who gives a new message of hope to the Harijans and the farm workers, occurs in the first part. He is a living force in death as in life; perhaps in death even more than in life. He comes up every now and then in the story, like King Charles's head. It is not for nothing that the author had second thoughts to call the story *Sanga Vijayam* (or "The Victory of Sangadas") and, in the event, kept it as an alternate title.

The central character is that of Ramadas who provides the link between the different strands in the story—that of Sangadas and Rama Naidu, of Choudury and his accomplices, of Venkata Das alias Thakkella Jaggadu and his gang of benevolent robbers. He goes through all the experiences, the evil machinations of Choudary, of life in the "settlement," of suffering in jail, of bereavement, loneliness, and of fulfilment at the end, with a sense of stoic resignation. He is human enough to rejoice in the initial harmony and happiness of his family life, but soon develops a spirit of non-attachment, reminiscent of the message of the *Bhagavad Gita*, to take the rough the smooth, and not to be elated by success nor to be depressed by failure. Strange to think, he never gives way to bitterness or frustration. His faith in the supremacy of Divine Will never deserts him. His solution for the problem of untouchables is purity of life, supported by faith in Providence, with possible understanding from the higher castes. It approximates roughly to Gandhiji's theory of change of heart.

More modern than him, his son Sangadas represents the efficacy of collective bargaining and reform through education for

realisation of their rights by the dispossessed. The third part is that of his first son, Venkatadas, that of radical change through violent revolution, if need be. He himself does not deny the efficacy of this method, but doubts the possibility of its universal acceptance.

The essence of Ramadas's social and political philosophy is summed in the following words :

> India has to give a lead to the world by establishing the efficacy of the path of non-violence... Political independence in itself is not our only aim. Self-government *(Swarajya)* must be a heavenly government *(Swargarajya)*. This won't be possible through violence. We can't enjoy the fruits of bloodshed.

At another level the nobility of the lower castes and the pettiness of the higher castes in the social heirarchy are conclusively demonstrated, time and again, pointing to the ideal of a casteless society.

It would be doing injustice to the novel to go away with the impression that it is all moral teaching and little else. The element of didacticism is no doubt constantly there at every stage. But none can deny the fact that the novel is essentially a work of art-mature and restricted. The picture of the Andhra countryside that emerges here is as vivid and authentic as any that could be found in Telugu writing in this century. Though written over half-a-century ago, it has to this day lost none of its freshness or vigour. Of the uplands of Andhra, represented by the dry taluks of Guntur district, it is hard to get a more precise or perceptive document in fictional writing than here.

Workmanship is something that is conspicuous by its absence in quite a few of the Telugu novels which had attained popularity out of all proportion to their merit. *Malapalli* remains one of the notable exceptions from the general run in this respect. The hand of the master-craftsman who knows his job from A to Z is evident on every page. The author is in full control of his material. There is no question of the story running away with him like an unruly horse. Nor does he permit himself the doubtful luxury

of discoursing on all topics under the sun and converting the novel into a slipshod encyclopaedia of social sciences or a juniors' book of knowledge.

The four parts of the novel are well arranged. The family, the conflict, the "settlement" and "the prison", with the release coming at the end for the central character, might be taken to symbolise the pilgrim's progress or the soul's journey in life on this earth. That apart, the whole material is neatly planned. The chapters are pruned and polished and fitted into the main chain of the story. The chapter headings—like the field, the backyard, the house, the family, the buffalo, the temple, the goddess, the harvest, the moneylender, etc. are aptly chosen. They are reminiscent of the technique of the well-made novel. If this practice is now out of fashion, it is a different matter. There is also meticulous attention to detail in depicting every aspect of rural life including the agricultural operations. It is all obviously based on first-hand observation and not derived from books or other second-hand sources.

A word or two about the style and language of *Maalapalli* will not be out of place in this review. It is, perhaps, the earliest novel in Telugu to adopt the spoken form of the language, which is now in universal currency in all works of prose fiction. The idiom is that of the countryside in the dry taluks of Guntur district. But there is no conscious attempt on the part of the author to confine it to the local dialect (except in some of the dialogues) to the extent of making it a regional novel, unintelligible to the rest of the Telugu-speaking country. The language is chaste and the idiom authentic. In the long passages of religious or philosophic discussion, the language assumes the subtety and depth of the classical prose of Tikkana in the Telugu *Mahabharatha*.

Looked at from this distance of time, the novel might be seen to be not altogether free from the defects peculiar to its stage of evolution. For one thing it is a little too long. The descriptions are often too elaborate and the dialogues are long-winded. The sections dealing with life in the "settlement" and in prison would lose little by condensation. The novel itself would stand

to gain in compactness by cutting and pruning. If it could be edited down to less than half its present size, it would read better. For another, in a realistic novel of this kind, some of the characters leave the impression of having been excessively idealised. Ramadas, for instance, is oftentimes an idealised version of a good Harijan. He is what a Harijan ought to be, in the author's imagination; not what most Harijans are or are likely to be. The credibility gap between the character and the reader is the widest in this case. And for a third, there is too much of direct preaching even for a novel with a social purpose. The moralising is reminiscent of Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones and Joseph Andrews.* The moral is implicit in any case here and could well have been left imperceptibly to the unfolding of the story, without underlining and undue emphasis.

Whatever be the shortcomings or scope for improvement, *Maalapalli* is a classic of modern Telugu fiction for more reasons than one. As a social document of a period in the nation's history, it is remarkable for its fidelity. As a linguistic experiment, it compels attention from the student of a Telugu language. It is certainly a powerful story. And that is what a novel is supposed to be.

✤

Seela Veerraju

MYNA

Introduced by: **Dr. G. Nageswara Rao.**

About the Novel :

Theme : evolution of a sensitive young man from innocence to experience.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : coastal Andhra and Telengana, particularly, Hyderabad; pre-independence days to the formation of Andhra Pradesh.

Principal Characters :

SAIBABA : the hero of the novel.

TIRUPATHAIAH : father of Saibaba.

KAMALA : daughter of Saibaba's maternal uncle, whom he marries.

MUSIA : the wife of old Saitji who makes use of Sai to find fulfilment for her sex-starved life.

HAFEEJA : daughter of a ruined Muslim nobleman for whom Sai develops platonic love.

Year of Publication : 1965.

Editorial Note :

SEELA VEERRAJU (b. 1939) combines in his personality several dimensions of creative achievement. A distinguished novelist and short - story writer, he is also a sensitive poet with several volumes of free verse to his credit. He has also the unique distinction of having successfully used the free verse form for stories. One of his volumes of free verse entitled Kodigattina Suryudu *won the Tilak Award given by the Free Verse Front. In addition, Sri Veerraju is also a gifted painter and one man shows of his paintings were held at several places including foreign countries such as West Germany.*

As a novelist, Veerraju brings the painter's eye and the poet's sensibility to bear on his fictional art. He has a sharp eye for the revealing detail and the symbolic image. As a result his novels evidence a mature sense of craft not only in the composition of a scene but also in the manipulation of verbal resources. This mature sense of craft is perceptible in his language: it has verve and vitality combined with naturalness and simplicity. Among his writings Karuninchani Devatalu, Kanti Poolu *and* Velugu Rekhalu *deserve particular mention.*

Synopsis :

Tirupathaiah was one of the numerous petty traders who sailed to Burma from coastal Andhra. He was not successful in business. On the way back from Burma a friend, who helped him, died and left his myna bird. He brings the myna home. As he vowed during a violent storm, he named his son Saibaba after the saint. He took to evil ways after his return from Burma.

Sai's childhood was spent in poverty, misery and a host of other unfavourable conditions. Very early in life he formed an emotional attachment to Kamala. He was selected for police training at Nizamabad. Here he came into contact with Musia who initiates him into the joys of the flesh.

Sai is transferred to Hyderabad. Very soon after his transfer it becomes the capital of integrated Andhra Pradesh. Here he

entered into a kind of platonic love relationship with Hafeeja, the daughter of a ruined muslim nobleman. He elevated her to the status of an ideal lady love and therefore failed to achieve any physical relationship with her. He was called back to his native village by a letter from his childhood love. He was tricked into a marriage.

He returned to Hyderabad with his wife. He lived a routine, dry domestic life. A son was born to him and the child died immediately after birth. Sai escaped death by accident on the same day. He collapsed on the day of republic day parade. He was admitted into the T. B. hospital. He wife, who was pregnant when she was forced to leave him after his admission to the hospital, gave birth to a daughter. Sai was discharged from the hospital immediately after he received the news of the birth of his daughter. Sai named his daughter Myna in memory of the bird myna whose death ushered in a life of misery for him. His daughter, he thinks, brought light and joy into his life.

Essay :

The title of the novel *Myna* has a symbolic significance. Myna is an Asiatic bird *(Eulabes religiosa)* resembling the starling; it has the ability to mimic human speech and is often kept as a pet. In the novel, the troubles of Sai begin from the day on which the pet myna of the family, which was a gift to his father by a friend who died on the way to Imphal from Burma, is killed by a cat because of Sai's negligence. And his troubles end on the day when he is blessed with a daughter whom he calls Myna. If life is compared to a river, the novel *Myna* presents the flow of life between those two significant turns in the stream of life: the death of the pet myna and the birth of the daughter Myna.

The novel *Myna* may be conveniently divided into four sections: life of Tirupathaiah, father of Sai, his journey to Burma, failure and return; Sai's childhood, the poverty and suffering he faced, his growth and development; his life with Musia and his varied experiences until he is separated from her

when he is transferred to Hyderabad ; and finally his life at Hyderabad until he is discharged from the T. B. Hospital and learns that he is blessed with a daughter.

The novel begins with the vivid scene of a ship caught in a violent storm. The scene symbolises the storm and calm of life we see in the course of life. Tirupathaiah is one of those many petty traders of Coastal Andhra, who sailed on the high seas. Unlike others who grew rich, he is a failure. As the storm is raging on the sea, he makes a vow to Nagool Meer Saibaba that if he is saved, he will name his son Saibaba. At that very moment his wife at home, who was in the family way when her husband left for Burma, gives birth to a male child. Tirupathaiah, after his return, names him Saibaba, who is called by all Sai.

Saibaba is a very sensitive child. His childhood is enveloped in misery because of his father's evil ways, dissipation and neglect of the family. Sai gets attached to his mother who endures all the suffering, protects and brings up her children. Sai's childhood is shaped by the cruel and dissipating father, suffering mother, irresponsible elder brother, helpless brother and sister and indifferent relatives. From early childhood, Sai develops a kind of infatuation for his maternal uncle's daughter Kamala, whom he ultimately marries—more accurately, is tricked to marry. Sai's childhood can be compared to that of Paul in Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers.*

Sai goes to Nizamabad to undergo police training. This period can be called the period of individuation when Sai is introduced to the complexities of life and initiated into the deeper aspects of life including sex life. In a way, this is a very happy phase of Sai's life : he sends money to his mother, helps his family and friends, has a job and comfortable place to live in and tastes the warm and the soothing love of a woman. Musia is the only woman who gave him warmth and joy, though none, including Sai, can escape the feeling that she made use of him to fulfill her sex-starved life ultimately to get a heir to her husband's wealth.

Sai is transferred to Hyderabad, which soon becomes the capital of the integrated Andhra State. Here he comes into

contact with Hafeeja, the daughter of a ruined Muslim nobleman. He elevates her to the status of an ideal lady-love in courtly romances and therefore fails to achieve physical relationship with her. The relationship between Sai and Hafeeja is like the relationship between Paul and Miriam in *Sons and Lovers.* A letter from his maternal uncle's daughter Kamala takes him home and he gets married to her.

He leads a strife-ridden and mechanical domestic life. He collapses in a republic day parade and it is diagnosed that he has T. B. In the hospital, he comes into touch with a writer from Andhra, has many platonic relationships with nurses who are divided by petty jealousies. He gets the news that he is blessed with a daughter and very soon he is discharged from the hospital. He tells the writer that he wants to name his daughter Myna.

It used to be said that there is no novel in Telugu which can be included without hesitation in the list of the great novels of the world because the texture of Andhra life and culture does not lend itself to be treated as material for a novel. Nevertheless, almost all the novels I have read for over two decades, are, in some degree or the other social novels. Andhras are emotional, aggressive, naive, rash, individualistic and sentimental. They do eat hot food, think quickly, speak rapidly. act impulsively, and respond readily to the varied incidents that occur in day to day life. But Andhras are not shallow. They are sensitive and are endowed with inwardness and warmth. If they are sentimental, they are as sentimental as all other Indians are and sentimentalism is not an undesirable element of life for an Indian.

I do not know why such a life cannot be material suitable for a novelist to work upon. Mr. Seela Veerraju's *Myna* shows that the material is adequate for the creation of a great novel — a novel that may be included in the list of the world's great semi-autobiographical novels like *David Copperfield* and *Of Human Bondage.*

The novel *Myna* acquires its peculiar artistic distinction not merely from the rich fabric of Telugu life it embodies but also from Mr. Veerraju's strong liking for sharp characterisation, his

delicate savour for particular events and persons, his sensitive response to the language really used by Telugu people of different regions and his perceptive understanding of the complexity of life and nature. Any sensitive reader of his collection of short stories, *Manasuloni Kunche* (literally, *the brush in the mind*, but metaphorically *the mind's brush* on the same analogy as *the mind's eye)* cannot fail to notice and be inpressed by these qualities unmistakably presented in them.

Very few novelists, I know, possess Mr. Veerraju's capacity for painting a scene or situation or portrait in words. His word-pictures and portraits, like those of Hardy and Lawrence, throb with life blood. To life and nature around him Veerraju opens not only his eyes that look but also his mind that perceives. That is what makes his pictures pulsate with life and feeling. His whole mechanism of sensibility — sight, colour, smell, touch, taste, thought and feeling- is fully communicated by his style, which, often, when necessary, reaches the heights of true poetry, if we remember that true poetry is not always written in *verse*, *metrical* or *free*. Mr. Veerraju's preface to his long poem *Mallee Velugu* (light again) shows that he is aware of that vital fact-- along with the other important fact : no verse is really *free* for one who has a *serious* job to do.

Mr. Veerraju's view that style is the life breath of the thematic material *(saili vasthuvu voopiri)* is, apart from being a good definition of style in general, a very apt description of his own style in particular. Before actually reading his novel, Veerraju politely asks his reader to note his view of the function of literature, of the novel and the aim and the scope of his novel *Myna*. He is fully aware of its limitations. The function of literature may be to reform life or reflelct it. It could be both. But *Myna*, according to the author, is not a kind of writing which aims at bringing about a reformation in anyone's life. It just mirrors the life of a particular individual. It reflects both sides of the coin of life, with a vividness and three dimensional life - like solidity, presenting a select portion of life in such a way that it appears to *happen* in the mind's eye of each reader. If the spectator assembles the varied pictures the author depicts and visualises them in a serial order, he will be able to see a cinematographic

picture of the whole work. For me, all that Mr. Veerraju claims about his novel is true and I venture to guess that any unbiased and cultivated reader will find it so.

The span of time the novel presents is not only long but also very significant in the sense that it begins in the pre-independent days and goes right up to the sixties. The period is a very eventful one in the history of the Andhras. After independence the Andhras, who were separated during the Mughal rule, are reunited when the Andhra state is formed. The effect of the formation of united Andhra on the lives of common people is portrayed with remarkable subtlety. The impact of the communist disturbances, the connected violence and bloodshed, the atrocious behaviour of the police in trapping criminals, the ways of officialdom-these are all fully brought out though they are incidental to the narrative.

What is of special interest to a modern reader of fiction is not simply the historical and social aspect of the novel. In shaping the character of the hero Sai, Mr. Veerraju shows how his innate sensitive nature is affected by the environment; how his helplessness from childhood prompted him to be shy and hesitant, even cowardly; how the economic and social factors left indeliable marks on his behaviour, thought and action. In this subtle building up of character through the interaction of events and incidents, Mr. Veerraju depicts the very evolution of a modern young man. The process also indicates the transition of a rooted rural man into an uprooted city-dweller and the struggle the individual undergoes between the gravitational pull of rural life and the pitiless dehumanising effect of city civilization. The isolation Sai faces as he grows, and the alienation he feels in the process of living make him a kind of non-heroic hero. In this respect, Mr. Veerraju depicts an experience which is true of all nations and peoples-which in fact is an important theme of most of the modern novels.

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Vattikota Alwaru. swamy

PRAJALA MANISHI

(A MAN OF THE PEOPLE)

Introduced by : **K. V. Ramana Reddy.**

About the Novel :

Theme : growing political awareness of the rural masses in the forties in the Nizam's dominions.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : Dimmagudem, a village in Kamareddy taluk of Karimnagar district in Andhra Pradesh.

Principal Characters :

KANTHIRAVAM : the protagonist.

RAMABHUPALA RAO : the local Patwari.

KOMARAYYA : a young villager.

HYDER ALI : head-clerk of Ramabhupala Rao.

Year of Publication : 1955.

Editorial Note :

VATTIKOTA ALWARUSWAMY is one of the most accomplished writers in the field of what can be broadly described as the "political novel". His fiction is based, by and large, on his own experience as an active collaborator and participant in the political movement in the erstwhile Nizam dominion. Alwaruswamy made the Telugu novel a sensitive mode to capture the socio - politi-

cal reality. As such the social and individual implications of political events form the main themes of his fictional exploration. In addition to the realistic and authentic portrayal of these implications—such as the growing political consciousness in rural areas and the increasing assertion of individual rather than herdiitary status. Alwaruswamy brings to his writing a rare integrity and detachment. Consequently, while the characters are representative of his political convictions, they do not remain stuffed figures or mere authorial projections. Alwaruswamy also published a collection of short stories entitled Jailu Lopala *(1950).*

PRAJALA MANISHI *remains, also, a linguistic landmark. It skilfully makes use of the idiom peculiar to the Telengana region without the slightest trace of naivete or artificiality. In this regard it may be justly regarded as a trend-setter.*

Synopsis :

Kanthiravam, a Vaishnava Brahmin had run away from home on account of ill-treatment at the hands of his elder brother, Venkatacharyulu. The latter is an accomplice of the local boss, Ramabhupala Rao, who, earlier had appropriated the *inam* which his father had granted to Venkatacharyulu's father, Raghunatha-charyulu, a man of great self-esteem. With the hereditary powers of a *Patwari*, Ramabhupala Rao rides roughshod over the villagers and makes use of Venkatacharyulu to forge a document in order to appropriate to himself the lands cultivated by Komarayya, after the death of his father. Komarayya is the boyhood friend of Kanthiravam.

Kanthiravam betook himself to Nizamabad where he is given food and shelter by a local Vaishnavite gentleman and, in the company of his son, Kanthiravam gains access to education, long denied to him. Coming into his own in the space of a year or two, he began taking a conspicuous part in local activities such as the library movement.

Meanwhile in his village the proselytising efforts of Ittehad-ul-Anjuman had roused the villagers to an unprecedented self-awareness, thanks to the counter-movement launched by Arya

Samaj, Ramabhupala Rao supporting the one and his lackey, Hyder Ali supporting the other. The highhandedness of Ramabhupala Rao in his treatment of a caste-Hindu like Komarayya had already generated in the minds at least of his castemen a feeling of silent resentment against the uncrowned monarch of the village and now this rivalry between the Anjuman and the Arya Samaj went a long way in widening the limits of the consciousness of the villagers.

It was into this fray that Kanthiravam chose to rush and he minced no words against the higher-ups at the village and the state-levels, Ramabhupala Rao and Sir Akbar Hydari. Komarayya joined him, although in his self-interest. The result : jail-sentences for both. The jail at Nizamabad was a hell for Komarayya, but to Kanthiravam it was a school where he learnt the lessons of the brotherhood of man transcending caste and religion.

By the time that he regained liberty, his village had undergone a great metamorphosis. It was no longer a question either of caste or of religion but one of incipient class-struggle between the poor and exploited peasantry on the one hand and on the other their common antagonist, Ramabhupala Rao. The villagers had dared to defy his protectors, the police and prevented him from ploughing the land in the village tank, which he had slyly managed to hold year after year in a false auction. Thanks to Parandhamayya, though a stranger from Nizamabad, the villagers had now a library and thanks to Vijayadev, an Arya Samaj preacher, they had been introduced slowly to greater and newer things. Ramabhupala Rao too was extending his sphere by taking a prominent part in the Andhra Mahasabha conference in Nizamabad.

And into this fast-changing village arrived Kanthiravam, accompanied by Bashir, his jail-mate who had his own sad story to tell. The four of these young men and Venkateswara Rao, the young Nizamabad Advocate, join together to unmask Ramabhupala Rao and incidentally Venkatacharyulu and to turn the tables upon them. The latter two are jailed on account of the forged document which had enabled Ramabhupala Rao to snatch

away from Komarayya the lands which in right ought to have belonged to some other, this being none other than Venkateswara Rao himself.

Ramabhupala Rao was humbled alright but his power was still intact. Soon after his release, he began once again lording it over the villagers. But now greater things were happening all around and the focus therefore shifts on to a wider stage, the first State Congress Satyagraha. Dimmegudem thus loses itself in the ocean of change and, Kanthiravam and his companions offer themselves as Satyagrahis. Here ends the story of the painful birth and the painfully slow growth of the awareness of the people of a village, the symbol of similar things taking place in the rest of that relic of medieval times, the Nizam's dominions. It was no longer an island closing upon itself but a part of the vast expanse of the sea of change.

Essay :

"What do you mean by your words 'good government' "? Bashir made haste to ask.

"Under a good government men would not be obliged to sell or to abandon their children as your parents did, to have something for themselves to eat. They would not brazenly take what belongs to others. They would not hate each other. There would not be men who cry for food and who go without education. All would live righteously. All would live in union. All would be kind, being essentially close to each other," Kanthiravam replied.

This passage occurs in the concluding chapter of *Prajala Manishi* or *The Man of the People*. It brings out succinctly the impossible-looking ideal of the novel's protagonist, Kanthiravam and, at the same time it also reveals a bit of the author's own mind.

Kanthiravam has a lion's share, if not a monopoly of the affection of his creator as no other character in this 250 page-long novel does. For a young, almost untutored and uncared-for

boy, it is certainly too much of a feat to be able to utter the words cited above. The change in him from a self-willed and wayward boy into a conscious and a resolute leader of men seems all too rapid. His learned and orthodox father would have been shocked and his loving mother distressed at their son's violation of the rules of caste and religion. For early in the novel the old man, Raghunathacharyulu is seen courting the displeasure of the Patwari, Ramabhupala Rao for declining to dine in the company of a fellow-Vaishnavite, Mohanacharyulu just on account of the fact that the latter had grown a crop of hair instead of having the time-honoured tuft. Ramabhupala Rao's displeasure cost him his sole means of livelihood, the land which the former's father had gifted. Now the man was beggared and like a respected beggar or Acharya he had to roam about the countryside in the company of his eldest-born, Venkatacharyulu to visit his followers, while his second son, Kanthiravam was being taken care of by a Muslim school-teacher and his wife. Here lies the clue to the strange ways of Kanthiravam. He owes his character to this Muslim couple as much as he owes it to his begetters. And the parting advice of his dying father not to smother his soul's yearning remained for ever impressed on his mind, although he seems to have conveniently forgotten the other part of the advice, a warning against striving against odds.

Kanthiravam is nothing if he was not striving, and striving both forward and upward at that. Spurned by his elder brother, he left home to the kindly roof of an elderly Vaishnavite gentleman of Nizamabad and there educated himself both literally and literarily. More than either, he educated himself into an awareness which carried him from one stage to another, and a higher, stage of public mindedness. His biography is thus merged into the biography of the people of the state, at once broader and vaster and yet alike in all essentials.

Being a historical rather than a mere social novel, *The Man of the People* shifts the reader's attention from the turns and twists of a single individual's life to a larger and a more significant theme—the painful onward progress of a whole society. The individual's private feeling's and emotions do not have to

yield place to the travails of society. A historical novel tries to achieve a coordination of the two, the private and the public and, its greatness as a novel of this genre depends mostly on the measure of its success in effecting this coordination.

Irving Howe states in his *Politics and the Novel* that the political novel is peculiarly a work of 'internal tensions,' tensions which inevitably arise from the conflict between the demands of depicting concrete experience which is particular to an individual and at the same time introducing a substance foreign to it by its very nature, viz., ideology, which is general and inclusive. The abstract ideas of the ideology have to be melted in and fused with the emotions of the individual character. Only then could ideology come to life. Otherwise it impedes and retards the movement of the novel. If a political novel is to succeed, it should not sacrifice the artistic demands of the novel to the political theme but achieve high drama, thanks to the conflict between the personal and the general, the concrete and the abstract.

In such a novel the idea of society penetrates into the consciousness of characters in all its problematic aspects, to quote Howe further. That is why one can see in the behaviour of the characters of the novel "some coherent political loyalty or ideological identification."

Vattikota Alwaruswamy, the author of this novel, succeeds in a large measure in his very first attempt at novel-writing. Himself a conscious public worker who took part in all the important movements that convulsed the Nizam's Dominions before 1947, he deliberately attempted to base his novel on the historical and political conditions in Telengana prior to the rise of the state Congress in 1938. In this sense, *The Man of the People* is a historical novel too. Alwaruswamy was never a by-stander either as a man or as a writer. His writings and his activities were intertwined and it is this sense of commitment that imparts to them all a genuineness which is somewhat unique. Historical novels in Telugu had acquired notoriety on account of the false, idealised and romanticised pseudo-history with which they abounded. Political novels, strictly speaking, have been a rare

commodity in Telugu. A novel of this species like U. Lakshminarayana's masterpiece *Malapalli* (The Hamlet of the Untouchables) is stupendous in its proportions, so awesome that rarely has any Telugu writer gone near it. K. Kutumba Rao's *Arunodayam* (The Dawn) and *Chaduvu* (Education) can also be grouped as political novels but in spite of their local colour the incidents in those novels could have taken place anywhere in the so-called circar districts of Coastal Andhra.

Not so the incidents in Alwaruswamy's novels and short stories. His other novel *Gangu* continues the story of *Prajala Manishi* to cover the years following 1938 when the state Congress, the Andhra Mahasabha and the Communist party took the newly-awakened people of the Nizam's Dominions to higher forms of struggle, both political and economic. His other prose-work *Jailu lopala* (Inside The Prison) is a collection of his short stories all of which stand witness to the author-protagonist's own sufferings and sacrifices in the course of those struggles. It is Alwaruswamy who in fact is the man of the people, Kanthivaram being cast in the author's own mould. The fact that both the author and the character are both Vaishnavaites cannot be missed, poverty and privation dogging their footsteps through life but ideals always evoking the best in them both.

Mr. Kaloji Narayana Rao, a popular poet and a friend of Alwarusawamy writes about him in a verse :

> He was not a mere historian
> He was himself history.

In a historical novel history should not be reproduced as it is actually unfolded. On the other hand, only the most outstanding events of historical significance can be described, and described not as in a text-book on history, but as in a novel by means of their impact on the lives of its characters. The latter should however be not lifeless representations of the contending forces of history but real individuals with flesh and blood whose personal feelings and sensibilities acquire meaning because of their having been influenced by the larger events. In fact there arises a conflict between characters which is a miniature replica of the bigger conflict between tradition and modernity, between

the old refusing to die and the new struggling to be born, between the vanishing past and the emerging present, in the course of human events. The 'politics' of the historical novel therefore is not a deadweight upon living human material but is part of life itself, a very important part indeed. It is this conflict which endows the historical novel with a sense of high drama.

Coming to the novel in question, one finds that the author has to a large extent succeeded in making his characters come to life not in spite of the novel's political theme but only because of it. The writing is at places uneven and as if with a sleight of hand the author has made one character viz., Venkatewara Rao, an advocate of Nizamabad, come to the rescue of the story, a *deux ex machina* as it were. But for his sudden arrival into the village in the company of Kanthiravam to whom he was introduced just a short time ago, Ramabhupala Rao and his accomplice, Venkatacharyulu could not have reaped the fruits of their earlier mischief in depriving Komaryya of his land in the name of Venkateswarlu. Even the damands of 'poetic justice' should not have impelled the author to spring a surprise on his readers like this. Similarly another character, Parandhamayya, falls like a bolt from the blue. He did not make his appearance in Nizamabad while Kanthiravam was there but the author says later that he had been a friend and a fellow-worker of Kanthiravam there.

These are faults no doubt, but they do not detract from the merits of the novel. For, it cannot be gainsaid that Alwaruswamy is a master of the novelist's craft. The history of the people of the Nizam's Dominions before the emergence of the State Congress has successfully been condensed and compressed, as indeed it should in a novel. From the Library Movement to the political movement is not a short step, but a veritable leap. The Andhra Mahasabha with its original programme of cultural and educational work quickly undergoes a big change and takes up the work of political awakening. The earlier communal bickerings between Ittehad-ul-Mussalmin on the one hand and the Arya Samaj on the other are replaced by national issues which, for the first time in the history of modern India, forge links between Hyderabad and the rest of the country, thus

putting an end to its long isolation in a political wilderness where the law of the jungle, Might is Right held sway for three centuries under the Asafjahi dynasty.

Kanthiravam was very mueh there in all these events, first as the secretary of the library committee at Nizamabad, where he organised a meeting in the teeth of Government restrictions. Then in his own village he challenged the authority of the legally-constituted authority, as represented by the police which accompanied the Anjuman leaders to help them convert the Harijans there. He went a step further and brought down the wrath of the police on his head by questioning the wisdom of Sir Akbar Hydari himself. His prison sentence only steeled him to further challenges and no sooner was he out of jail than he rushed back to his village to embroil himself with the local boss, Ramabhupala Rao who is tiger and jackal rolled into one, kowtowing even to a Tahsildar and lording it over villagers. Caste and class jostle with each other in the life and thinking of the villagers and ultimately it is the latter which unites them all against their common oppressor. The whole village, at least its male section, is now agog. Every one finds his voice again, the barber and the dhobi, the cowherd and the cobbler, literally every one. It is a memorable scene of life bestirring itself after a long, long hibernation. It is the awakening of the consciousness of the unreconcilable struggle between classes. It is humanity asserting itself against power and pelf, oppression and exploitation.

Kanthiravam had broken the taboos of caste and religion, but recognising their obstinate hold on the minds of others,. asks his mother and sister-in-law to stick to them if they chose and at the same time to live in and look after the 'commune' which he had set up in the village, with Venkateswara Rao, obviously a *vaidiki* Brahmin, Parandhamayya and Vijayadev whose caste is unknown and above all, Bashir, a social castaway who, born to Vysya parents, joined a gang of pickpockets and became a regular jail-bird, all the while thinking he was a Muslim. The narrow compartments into which the people of the land were divided for centuries are crumbling in the face of change.

The Man of The People may not, and indeed it is not, a great novel but it is a tolerably good novel. It is a remarkable

piece of writing in that the author deliberately chose to employ the colloquial dialogue of that region for his characters, even the Brahmin characters being unable to escape from its influence totally. Another thing to be noted is that with very few exceptions the author has supplied the family names *(Inti Perlu)* to his characters which is very very rare, if not totally absent, in the Telugu novel. Without this the characters cannot be fixed and labelled. Men do not live in a vacuum. They live in a world of innumerable distinctions and divisions all of which must hold the attention of a writer, if his writing is to gain credibility as a "slice cut from life" as it is actually lived.

A ring of genuineness, an authenticring, it is this, more than all others, which marks off this novel *The Man of The People* from spurious stuff, that goes under the name of historical novel in Telugu literature. This novel has fathered many a good historical novel in Telugu, Mahidhara Ramamohan Rao, Bollimunta Sivaramakrishna, Gollapudi Narayana and lately, Dasarathi Rangacharya being its inheritors. Alwaruswamy's place in this company is indeed high.

*

Viswanatha Satya-narayana

VEYI PADAGALU

[THOUSAND HOODS]

Introduced by : **Paturi Sri Rama Sastry.**

About the Novel :

Theme : the confrontation of tradition and modernity, with the gradual decline of the old order.

Setting, Background & Time of Action : Subbannapeta, the village head-quarters of a zamindar; 1930's.

Principal Characters :

1. KRISHNAMA NAIDU : Zamindar of Subbannapeta.
2. RAMESWARA SASTRY : hereditory Diwan of Subbannapeta.
3. DHARMA RAO : son of No. 2 by the Brahmin wife.
4. RANGA RAO : son of No. 1.
5. RUKMINI-AMMA-RAO : wife of No. 1.
6. GANACHARI : unmarried devotee of Lord Siva.
7. GIRIKA : Devadasi of Lord Venugopalaswamy, daughter of No. 5. deemed as a sister by No. 3.
8. RATNAGIRI : Concubine of No. 2.
9. RANGAJAMMA : Kshatriya wife of No. 2.
10. SAVITRAMMA : Brahmin wife of No. 2.

11. ARUNDHATI : wife of No. 3.
12. HYMAVATI : *Vysya* wife of No. 2.
13. MANGA : *sudra* wife of No. 2.
14. PASIRIKA : son of No. 2 & 13.
15. RAJYALAKSHMAMMA : a lady of Rangapuram responsible for the Union of 3 & 11.
16. RAGHAVA RAO (Brahmin), PASUPATI (Brahmin), KIRITI RAO (Reddy), SURYAPATI (Kamma) : Class-mates of No. 3.
17. RADHAKRISHNAIAH, RAMESWARAM, SARVARAYUDU : First cousins of No. 4.
18. NAGESWARA RAO : Diwan of Subba-nnapeta appointed by No. 4.
19. JOSYULU : a Head Master of a local board school.
20. MANGAMMA : his wife.
21. CHINNA ARUNDHATI : daughter of Pasupati.

Year of Publication : 1935.

Editorial Note :

KAVISAMRAT VISWANATHA SATYANARAYANA (b.1895) is one of those rare literary phenomena whose many - splendoured genius cannot be buckled within the belt of a short editorial note. A profound scholar with an almost encyclopaedic range, his irre-pressible creativity has found all the literary genres equally facile and supple modes. Though an uncompromising 'traditionalist', he is not unaware of the contemporary intellectual and aesthetic trends. His basic stance however, remains rooted in the firm conviction regarding the enduring vitality and continuing validity of Indian tradition. Consequently, literature for him is not a mere aesthetic or linguistic artifact but a sadhana, *a way of life, a mode of the quest for truth. Viswanatha has evolved a correspondingly complex*

linguistic mode for his creative needs. Apparently terse, his style is instinct with the connatative density and richness of Sanskrit and Telugu linguistic traditions. Awareness of these traditions is a condition precedent for the full appreciation of this style.

Sri Viswanatha is a prolific writer (having published more than sixty books) and can range with effortless ease and mastery in all forms of literature: while he can be intensely lyrical with a tenderness all his own (as in Kinnerasaani Paatalu*), he can also scale incomparable heights of epic grandeur as in his* magnum opus, Ramayana Kalpavruksham *(for which he won the Jnana Pith Award). He is eqally gifted in the art of drama, as evident in* Anarkali. *Above all, as a literary critic he brings, acute insight and interpretative depth to his analysis, as in* Nannayagari Prasanna Kathaklitartha Yukti *and* Sakuntalam.

In his massive novel VEYI PADAGALU, *Sri Viswanatha catches with consummate mastery the passing of an entire cultural and social context as a result of its being sucked in by the maelstrom of industrialization and urbanization. The thematic implicaions concern themselves with related issues: the dissolution of the close-knit joint family structure and its values; the deterioration of cultural and spiritual norms and the consequent decline in personal integrity and honesty. No thematic analysis can however do justice to the intricate and complex texture of the novel which remains a panoramic presentation of Telugu life and thought.*

Essay :

The Author

Kavisamrat Viswanadha Satyanarayana is a Kalaprapurna of Andhra University and was awarded Padma Bhushan by the President of India. He is also the Jnana Pith award winner of one lakh of rupees for his work *Ramayana Kalpa Vriksham.* The laurels he won bear no comparison to his literary genius, for there is not a literary pursuit which he did not enliven with his brilliant pen. There is a versatility in his approach, be it prose, poetry, lyric, drama, novel or essay. He is orthodox, yet is more modern than the most modern in his taking up the newer

forms of literary experiments. His style is terse yet musical, erudite yet pleasant, soft yet high-flown and in some cases even inexplicable. There is one and only one Kalidasa in Sanskrit and only one Viswanadha Satyanarayana in Telugu who wrote in all forms and styles of contemporary writing. There is an aura of intellectual aristocracy about him, which is only natural to a scholar of his type with depth of knowledge, width of vision and an intuitive probe into the intricasies of whatever subject or form he chooses. The intellectual arrogance nay, assertive superiority is seen in the author's own verse (rendered in Telugu in Roman script) praising his guru the Late Chellapilla Venkata Sastry at a grand function organised at Vijayawada in 1949 to felicitate the latter on being honoured on his appointment as the poet-laureate of the then Madras Government at which this humble writer had the good fortune to listen:

"ala nannayyaku ledu tikkanaku leedaabhoga masmaadru sun—
Dalaghu svaadu rasaavataara dhisha Naahankaara sambhaara doo—
hala brahmiimayamuurti Sishyu Dainaa Danna TTidaa vyoomapee-
Sala caandri mridukiirti cellapiLa vamsasvaami kunna tlugan."

Broadly translated into English prose it reads :

"Nannayya and Tikkana are denied the luxury, my Guru Chellapilla could afford, of having a disciple of my calibre equipped with intellectual arrogance, divine inspiration and aesthetic values, all in abundance."

The Novel

The present novel *Veyi Padagalu* is reported to have been written in 29 days, the manuscript in 1000 pages with 1000 characters indicative of the one thousand hoods of Adiseshu, who, according to Hindu Mythology, is bearing the earth on his head. It is also very interesting to note that the names of the characters, be it men or women, are directly or indirectly connected with the name of Lord Subrahmanyeswara (Snake-god),the family

deity of the Zamindari of Subbannapeta. "veeyi padagala paamu vippaarukoni vacci kaatandukonnadi kalalona raajunu" is the introductory couplet to this novel to say that the King (Zamindar) dreamt that the thousand-hooded serpent dug its fangs into him. It is suggestive of the extinction of the dynasty of the Zamindars of Subbannapeta for angering the family deity by taking to Western ways of life giving up traditional principles of Hinduism. The next Zamindar in the hierarchy after Krishnama Naidu was Ranga Rao who always lived at Madras in Western style while his Hindu wife Sarojini lived at Subbannapeta. Zamindar Ranga Rao went to England picked up a girl called Susanne from a financially low family with the intention of marrying her. After her arrival in India, Susanne indianised her name to 'Sasini'. Subsequent events in the novel show that there was no successor to Ranga Rao, young Harappa by his Hindu wife having passed away in his early teens. The reversion of Ranga Rao back to the Hindu way of life was achieved by the author through the process of his ailment being cured by Ayurveda (Indian System of Medicine) where allopathy or the Western system failed.

The establishment of the Zamindari of Subbannapeta has a legend behind it, based on the divine inspiration of a poor Brahmin astrologer in whose dreams Lord Subrahmanyeswara appeared and ordered the construction of a temple at a place where the Brahmin's cow was milking itself on the anthill inside which he lived. Veeranna, an ardent devotee of Vishnu who became suddenly rich by hitting on a treasure trove in sharing a booty along with his friends in an abandoned room of a house where pots of gold were hidden. He wanted to construct a fort and establish a Zamindari and met the Brahmin astrologer in a hamlet. He guided Veeranna to construct the fort and a temple for Lord Subrahmanyeswara and predicted that the fort will have a glorious uninterrupted future for three centuries. Veeranna simultaneously constructed the fort, a temple for Lord Subrahmanyeshwara and a temple for Lord Venugopalaswamy. The construction of these two temples by the same person is indicative of the oneness of the Almighty whatever be his form and so is vicariously indicative of Advaita that the soul and the God are within the frame work of the human body and are not different.

The Characters

The characters in this novel are intensely Telugu revolving round tradition, convention and are indigenous, with rare exceptions which only prove their innate Telugu nature. The Zamindars of Subbannapeta, as is the case with most of the Telugu Zamindars, are the benefactors of their people, bounteous to the traditional styles of literature, exhibitional arts and forms of folk art. The fort of Subbannapeta was a museum, a zoo, a library and a seat of learning to the people of the Zamindari. They respected the Hindu conventions and were devoted to the two deities Subrahmanyeswara and Venugopalaswamy. There is an intimacy and mutual respect between the Zamindar and the hereditary diwan. Krishnama Naidu and Rameswara Sastry were very highly self respecting persons and a minor difference of opinion separated them for years.

Ganachari, a girl devoted to Lord Shiva with an avowed celibacy, usually from a Sudra (non-brahmin) family is found only in the Telugu land. The girl is endowed with an intuition for predicting incidents that would happen in future. In this novel the Ganachari dances and sings under the spell of divine inspiration and predicts ominous incidents that lead to the extinction of the Zamindari or the death of an important person.

Girika, a 'devadasi' devoted to the service of Venugopalaswamy, is the daughter of Rameswara Sastry and Ratnagiri. She is initiated into the intricacies of devotional works, like *Krishnaleela Tarangani* of Saint Narayana Tirtha, *Muvvagopala Padams* (Romantic devotional songs on Gopala of Muvva, a village in Krishna District of Andhra pradesh) by Kshetriah, who are both Telugus, as also into *Geetagovinda* of Jayadeva by Dharma Rao, son of Rameswara Sastry who is an erudite scholar and considers Girika as his sister, being the progeny of the same father. This system of 'devadasis' is introducted originally for offering prayers in song and dance to the Vaishnava deities and an endowment of land is made for their sustenance. Later on, they became concubines of a single individual, almost a wife, and the daughter of a 'devadasi' became a 'devadasi' again. Some of the fallen women of the 'devadasi' system took to

prostitution as a profession. Girika, the devadasi in the novel is intensely devoted to Venugopalaswamy, never accepts another man and deems the Lord to be her husband. Arundhati the wife of Dharma Rao and Radhantari wife of Ramachandra Raju, danghters-in-law of Rameswara Sastry joke and jibe at Girika on her intense devotion to Lord Venugopala. Such things are common among sisters-in-law in Telugu society. Dharma Rao used to explain to her the various bhavas (emotions) and rasas (aesthetic experiences) in the various works he introduces Girika to. Her knowledge and devotion are nurtured by the inspiration given by Dharma Rao and reach emotional heights. Girika, with avowed celibacy, ultimately attains salvation at the feet of Lord Venugopala. her soul merging into him. Girika is akin to Meerabai but with a difference. Both are celibates. Meera is married and Girika is unmarried, but both deem Lord Vishnu as their Lord and husband. One is a devotional composer-singer while the other is a devotional dancer, dancing the devotionals of great composers. There is similarity and a dissimilarity between Meera and Girika. One existed, whereas the other is an immortal creation of the author.

Pasirika is a thin greenish snake that lives usually in the fields. In this novel, Pasirika is the son of Rameswara Sastry and Manga (Sudra wife) has a thin, wiry, body, green in colour with a light brownish hair, used to playing with snakes in the fields and ant-hills and they never used to hurt him, even though some of them were highly poisonous. This is apparently unnatural but it is not so, since one who lives among snakes is rarely hurt by them. Due to the establishment of a municipality a western type of school under Christian Missionaries, the village of Subbannapeta was transformed into a township with all modernities, (like a cinema hall established by Rameswarm, a cousin of Ranga Rao, who became the President of the Taluka Board). The paddy fields became residential areas and the high level fields growing dry crops, where Pasirika used to play with snakes were irrigated destroying the ant-hills and the snakes were driven away. Pasirika found no place for him to play and stuck to his house, occasionally came out and used to utter a sound "anna" or brother when he met Dharma Rao. Each had a liking for the other being brothers with the same paternity.

Fraternal intimacy and affinity drew them together. Years after the modernisation of the village, Pasirika went out, going across the river over the bridge to play with his erstwhile friends, the snakes, who lost contact with him and Pasirika meets with a tragic end, out of a snake-bite, for he was now a stranger.

Dharma Rao is practically the hero of the novel, and a recondite scholar in Telugu and Sanskrit has been reduced to penuary by the time his father Rameswara Sastry passes away. Krishnama Naidu, the Zamindar came to their rescue for performing obsequies of Rameswara Sastry. Rameswara Sastry, when affluent, has lavish generosity and did not allow his left hand know what his right hand gave, but contracted debts from those who were earlier subsidised by him. The ungrateful rich came down upon the family and he knew that his riches were dwindling. All this landed the family in losing all property and money, but for the lone ancestral house. Dharma Rao discontinued his education having no money with him. The Zamindar's wife Rukmini-amma-rao, called Dharma Rao to the fort and asked him to continue his studies promising financial support. Prestige made him refuse the offer but he yielded to the pursuasion of the Zamindarini. Dharma Rao was already married to Arundhati, his uncle's daughter, while they were rich. Compared to their status both socially and economically, his uncle's was not equal in rank to them. Savitramma pressed in the marriage of her brother's daughter with Dharma Rao even though her brother's status was not a match to theirs. With the downfall of Dharma Rao's family riches, his uncle never came to them nor sent his girl to their house although they were in neighbouring villages. He did not visit them, even when Rameswara Sastry passed away, sitting alone in the temple of Subrahmanyeswara. He despised the family of Dharma Rao to the hearing of his daughter, Arundhati. Every one in his family had an antipathy for Dharma Rao and injected the same into the tender mind of Arundhati. Savitramma sent word to her brother for arranging the cousummation of the marriage of Arundhati with Dharma Rao. In Telugu families, the consummation of marriage is for three nights and on the first night, Arundhati did not respond to the amorous approaches of her husband, Dharma Rao, as she had a poisoned mind.

Rajyalakshmamma, a middle aged lady of Rangapuram village, came to know of this. On the pretext of weaving a floral plait for the second day. she spoke to Arundhati about the sterling qualities of Dharma Rao, his nobility, self respect, erudition and his good nature. She succeeds in converting Arundhati into a loving wife. Dharma Rao adored Rajyalakshmamma and was ever beholden to her. On the first night in their bed chamber at Subbannapeta, Arundhati was frightened by the appearance of a snake. Dharma Rao quietened her by telling her that it must be his father who came to bless them and see in her, his first love Rangajamma as she resembled the great lady who presented her the black saree she was wearing. That's the intelligence of Dharma Rao. The characterisation of Dharma Rao as an ardent follower of 'Varna-asrama-dharmas' is significant in his name and reflects in itself the attitudes and views of the author. Arundhati and Dharma Rao after the initial conflict become a very loving couple, each with a devotion to the other. Characters appear and go in thier lives but they are one, till the cruel hand of death took away Arundhati. It is equally cruel that a man of Dharma Rao's principles and knowledge, should become a creature of circumstances into marrying Chinna Arundhati, the daughter of his friend Pasupati, much against his conscience, on human grounds of saving her life, just because she for reasons best known to her deems Dharma Rao as her husband. Indeed, strange are the decrees of fate. Dharma Rao went there as a saviour on Pasupati's request and came back with an explicit promise of marrying her. This is supposed to be a reflection of the author in real life marrying for a second time when his first very much loved spouse passed away.

Then one finds Ranga Rao, who inherits the Zamindari of Subbannapeta. He lived most of his time at Madras, the then State Capital. He indulges in all the luxuries of the Capital. Throwing lavish parties to the Governor and other dignitaries of the State, maintaining a stable for race horses, marrying Susanne from England, neglecting his Hindu wife Sarojini who stayed only at Subbannapeta with their son, the young Harappa who is drawn towards the Hindu way of life, irrespective of his being tutored by foreigners, due to the profound influence Dharma Rao

had on him and his own mother, a respector of the Indian way of life. During his discussions with Dharma Rao while under his tutelage, young Harappa developed a profound admiration for Girika's devotion to the deity, Venugopalaswamy. It must be said once over that Dharma Rao is an all pervading character in the novel and is even omnipresent in every incident in the novel and is associated directly or indirectly with every character in the novel. This is on account of Dharma Rao's firm belief in all that is Indian or Hindu way of life, be it litera. ture, society, arts or medicine and converts even Ranga Rao to accept Ayurveda as against Allopathy when it failed to cure him. By the time Ranga Rao is mentally attuned to the concepts of Dharma Rao, young Harappa had already left this mundane sphere and is in Lord Venugopala's and Lord Subrahmanyeswara's embrace.

Of the three cousins of Ranga Rao who were looking after the general affairs of Subbannapeta estate besides the Dewan, Nageswara Rao appointed by him, Rameswaram was more aggressive, self-centred and corrupt in every way and may be styled as the villain of the novel. He took every opportunity to amass wealth and spent the money of the estate for his own personal ends. He even went to the extent of using the revenues of Subbannapeta Zamindari for his electioneering campaign to get elected to the Taluka Board and became its President. He took away the electrical generator, purchased at the time of Ranga Rao occupying the 'Gadi', for running a cinema in Subbannapeta which became a township by then. His corruption now shifted from the coffers of Subbannapeta Zamindari to the treasury of the Taluka Board. He went on intensive tours of the Taluka and extended patronage to all who were subservient and praised him. One of the persons that came under the shade of his poisonous hood was Josyulu, the head-master of a Taluka Board School at Rangapuram, a village few miles from Subbannapeta. Josulu invited Rameswaram, on one of his visits, to his house for a lunch. It is a custom in Telugu homes that the lady of the house should serve the food to the guests and Mangamma served the food to Rameswaram. While the food was being served, Rameswaram was casting eyes at Mangamma to which she never paid any heed. Rameswaram paised the dishes prepared by Mangamma and

Josyulu took it to be a guest's compliment and never read beyond it. So, he invited him to his house for a meal everytime Rameswaram visited the village. Rameswaram used to visit his house quite often and the visits were the subject of talk in the school among the teachers. Rameswaram enticed Mangamma, tender in age, unsophisticated, orthodox, yet beautiful, tempting her with money and presents, beyond her expectation and reach. All this behind the back of Josyulu. For the continuance of his affair with Mangamma, Rameswaram transferred Josyulu to Subbannapeta. Finding costly sarees, valuable jewellery and money in the trunk of his wife, Josyulu gave a good beating to her, unable to say anything to Rameswaram, his superior. Although an opportunist, Josyulu was by no means a pimp. The in-roads of the affair into his self-respect were too deep and heavy for Josyulu to bear. Starvation was his vehicle for self-immolation. He, one day called his wife, who was hardly seventeen and poured out his agony. He ordered her not to observe the traditional brahmin widow-hood. He extracted a promise from her to fleece Rameswaram to the last pie as a retribution for the seduction.

Starvation emaciated him and the worm of denigrated self-respect was eating into the marrow of his bones. He became mad and one day he was raving about Rameswaram openly near the latter's cinema hall and was beaten to death by one of the rowdy accomplices of Rameswaram. Mangamma, of orthodox Hindu Brahmin origin, was still the dutiful wife of Josyulu at heart, even though she was the mistress of Rameswaram. Mangamma was constantly at the job of fulfilling the pledge given to her late husband. This may appear to be a contradiction in terms but it is not. The mind is supreme and the physique is only a subsidiary. Her body was polluted but her mind was pure. An infatuated Rameswaram transferred all the properties as also a bank account, into Mangamma's name. He was caught in a case of forgery of currency and wanted money for his defence. Mangamma refused the money, closed the account in the local bank and decamped to Bezwada (Vijayawada) with the money, jewellery, documents and other valuables. For the sins of perjury, forgery and deceit, Rameswaram was sentenced to six-years rigorous imprisonment and was in prison. Mangamma

returned back to Subbannapeta. All this took six to seven years after the death of Josyulu. During this period she met a number of persons, some of them had an amorous eye on her and some had great belief in her natural but latent goodness. Mangamma became pious. She did not know other men besides her husband and Rameswaram. Having achieved her objective ordained by her husband, she wanted to seek consolation in giving away her riches. She donated large sums of money for celebrating Girika's merging into Venugopalaswamy. She gave her house and quite a large amount to Kumaraswamy for whose family she developed an affection. Meantime, a plot to murder her was hatched by one Radhapati who engaged Chengalrao for the task. Kumaraswamy had an incling of the attempts at Mangamma's life and was going and watching her at her house during the nights. He had also information from Madras. One night Kumaraswamy slept off and woke up suddenly, intuitively went to the Police Station and took the Inspector of Police to Mangamma's house. By that time, Chengalrao has stabbed Mangamma to death. Chengalrao was caught red-handed. A thought ran across Kumaraswamy's mind. Piety and sin are different entities. One cannot buy piety with money and riches. Mangamma met her tragic end on Ekadasi, a holy day and Kumaraswamy hoped that she would reach the feet of the all-pious God. Thus both Rameswaram and Mangamma met their logical end albeit, Mangamma had a mission to destroy the person that was responsible for her moral degradation.

A Critique

While one goes through the pages of Viswanadha's *Veyi Padagalu,* one is reminded of the Nobel Prize novel 'Forsyte Saga' of John Galsworthy. Galsworthy's novel is intensely English and unfolds the English society of those times from the conservative Englishman to the modern one, who goes out of England and marries an American girl, whereas Viswanadha's '*Veyi Padagalu*' is every inch a Telugu novel and deals with several generations as in *Forsyte Saga,* upto the early thirties of this century. One knows all about the English society, their culture, tradition, customs and manners thoroughly and completely in *Forsyte Saga* while *Veyi Padagalu* unravels the hidden treasures of

Telugu culture. tradition, society and the Telugu way of living, in all its myriad aspects symbolised by the title itself liberally translated as 'Thousand Facets'. There is not an aspect of contemporary life that was not described, depicted and discussed in the novel through its many charact rs.

The thirties of this century were highly significant more particularly of the Indian struggle for independence which had a phenomenal effect on the Telugus, on account of their quick reaction and emotional involvement in matters that are Indian, like the Bengalis. The Brahmosamaj movement of Bengal took a quick root in the Telugu soil and grew to considerable dimensions and is symbolised in the character of Kesabji, probably adapted from Keshab Chandra Sen of Bengal. The Theosophical Society, started by Dr. Annie Besant and her contemporary Leadbeater, is mainly intended to interpret Hindu religion to the younger generation which is getting anglicised on account of schools, colleges and universities started by the middle of the nineteenth century by the Christian missionaries and the British rulers. The Indian was quickly losing sight of the essential principles of the Indian way of life, given out in the scriptures. So the Theosophical Society was started by Dr. Annie Besant, an Irish Lady who became an Indian and interpreted the scriptures appealing to the intellect of the educated Indian. While all this was true in the case of the towns in the Telugu land, the villages were still essentially Hindu or Indian in the Telugu-speaking area. Brahmosamaj is a reformist movement devoted to the worship and prayer of the cosmic force but Indian, whereas the theosophical society tried to give an interpretation to the various Hindu scriptures and customs as they stood and even believed in the various incarnations of God. One of the characters in this novel identifies himself as Lord Krishna as has heen done by Krishnaji (Jiddu Krishnamurthy, a successor to Dr. Annie Besant) of the Theosophical Society of India.

Raghava Rao, one of the the class-mates of Dharmarao, is an emotional nationalist and went to jail a number of times which left his friends in doubt on several occasions whether he is in or out of prison. The friendship between Dharmarao, Suryapati, Kiriti, Pasupati and Raghava Rao was so intimate

and true that had no mental or physical reservations including the money which they used irrespective of the person to whom it belonged. Such intimacies, liberties and affections are something that pertain to an era that has gone by. All the friends were meeting at one place or the other and reminisced about their younger days while enjoying the same mutual understanding. All of them loved arts and Dharmarao was a learned critic. While going through the novel, one is astounded by the profundity of knowledge manifest in the novel by the author, be it music, drama or dance. The appreciation of musical concerts arranged during the celebrations of the accession of Rangarao to the Zamindari of Subbannapeta, the critical eye with which the dramatic perforamances were seen and the intimate knowledge of the dance-dramas in the traditional Kuchipudi style, a form native to the Telugu soil, are all examples of the encyclopaedic knowledge and grip of the author on various subjects. Indian philosophy and its significance were thoroughly discussed in the novel. This was achieved through the process of Dharmarao explaining to Girika, *Krishna-Leela-Tarangini* (the waves in the ocean of the deeds of Krishna an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in the form of song). *Krishna Karnamrita* of Leelasuka (a devotional work on the life of Lord Krishna in verse form) and Jayadeva's Geeta Govinda (the amorous life attributed to Lord Krishna with a philosophical significance again in the the form of song) all these in Sanskrit and Muvva-Gopala Padams of Kshetrayya in Telugu which ultimately lead Girika to attain salvation at the feet of Venugopalaswamy and her soul merging into Him, while dancing with verve and exotic emotion.

Symbolism is the main stay of the novel, and the thousand-hooded Adiseshu losing all his heads but two is symbolised in thei dol of Subrahmanyeswara at Subbannapeta, while the losing of the rest of the hoods is symbolic of the degeneration that set in, in the Indian way of life losing one hood after the other i. e., losing one facet after the other of the spiritual life practised by Indians in general and Telugus in particular. The author's heart bleeds at the way the spiritual aspects of life are being lost in the vomitting of blood by Adiseshu while losing one of his hoods. Ganachari symbolises Saivism whereas Girika symbolises Vaishnavite devotional cult, while Dharmarao is symoblic of Advaita

philosophy, the oneness of God and the soul or in other words symbolises the singleness of God irrespective of the form in which He is worshipped. Pasirika with his slender green body and brown hair is indicative of the green stem and brown corn in the fields or alternatively the cereal plant which supplies the food for man to sustain and would be destroyed if not properly cared for. Rameswarasastry is reminiscent of the 'Varnasramadharmaas' which give the liberty for a brahmin to marry from all the four castes, the progeny inheriting the caste of the mother. Rameswarasastri's progeny be it through a brahmin, kshatriya or sudra wife or his concubine, all live in perfect harmony like brothers and sisters as though born of the same mother. This is symbolie of the perfect harmony in which all the castes lived. Although the system originally planned as an economic and social form of life which can be even described as a socialistic pattern lost its harmonious nature in later times, built enclosures for each caste to live in, resulting in casteism which was far from the objective with which the castes were created. The Brahmin for knowledge, the Kshatriya for defence, the Vaisya for trade and the Sudra for cultivation of land were the orgiginal intentions of sage Manu's code of human conduc and living which was followed with vigour and rigour till about the middle of the nineteenth century. The death of Ganachari after Girika's exit is symbolic of the last link being broken between spiritualism and materialism.

Krishnamanayudu, Rangarao's father was practically the last of the benevolent Zamindars of Subbannapeta and Rangarao's taking an English wife is the culmination of the degeneration that set in, due to the westernishd outlook. When Harappa, Rangarao's son was dressed in the western style and presented to his mother, Sarojini, she turned her head away with abhorrence of the western style and when Harappa was brought back to her in the Indian style of the Telugu Zamindars, she received him with pleasure and affection, while awaiting death. Rukminiammarao, the queen mother of Rangarao and Sarojini, his wife, pass away with a difference of a few days and Harappa was denied the opportunity to perform the obsequies of his mother and grand-mother as ordained in the scriptures. Having been under the guidance of Dharmarao, Harappa languishes over his

inability to perform the rituals after their deaths and himself passes away. The death of Lakshmanaswamy, the estate elephant, which carried several of the Zamindars of Subbannapeta on his back during processions, runs amuck and passes away. This is indicative of the extinction of the race of the Zamindars of Subbannapeta. Although Rangarao adopts young Harappa to succeed him, the historical lineage of the Zamindars of Subbannapeta came to a dead end and the prediction of the brahmin who indicated the spot where the fort is to be built came true after three hundred years of glorious existence of the Zamindars.

The descriptive passages in the novel are very highly scholarly and take the reader into the depths of Telugu culture. The author chose a very wide canvas for the pen-portraits of the several facets of Telugu culture, living and literature. Indeed, the novel is a treatise on Telugu culture. The author's treatment of the novel is mostly subjective, the emotional content being supplied by the poetic outlook of the author which can very easily be deciphered in the novel. The respectful attitude the author bears towards the spiritual and cultural heritage of the Hindus as also his strong disapproval of the degeneration in values, due to anglicisation and westernisation, not only in the mode of life but also in matters of religion, is evident throughout. He does not approve of the attitudes and methods adopted by the Christian missionaries in converting the Hindus of the Telugu areas. Sarojini and Susanne are respectively the protagonist and the antogonist for the Hindu way of life.

In the end the despair of the author can very easily be discerned in the values being lost and degeneration that has set in, in the Indian way of life. He bemoans the loss of spiritual and cultural values of life and is confronted by a vacuum that is hard to fill up. Thus ends one of the greatest novels in Telugu literature, *Veyi Padagalu* or Thousand Hoods or Thousand Facets, sculptored by the master - architect Kavisamrat Viswanadha

Satyanarayana. The novel acquired the status of an epic from among the novels of Telugu Literature; for, it describes the glorious times of a bygone period with historic authenticity, literary flavour and poetic inspiration. It is a novel that will live in the minds of the readers with a positively sweet hang-over and will live as long as the Telugu Novel lives.

It has given me immense pleasure to present this perspective of 'Veyi Padagalu' in all humility and veneration for the author.

*



INTRODUCING YUVABHARATHI

Yuvabharathi is a literary and cultural organisation with a difference.

On youth depends the nation's progress, even survival. To discharge this responsibility youth must be inspired by higher ideals, disciplined to the core and dedicated to the purpose. It is the creative and constructive manner of the youth's behaviour that guarantees the transmitting of better values to the coming generations. Efforts have to be made to ensure the development of a composite personality, capable of serving society constructively. It is necessary to pool like minded youth with a determination to serve. We realise that educated people have a greater responsibility and bigger role to play. *Yuvabharathi* acts to create the most needed awareness with the object of making youth more responsible and responsive.

The seeds of war are said to be sown in the minds of men ; so are the seeds of peace, the seeds of progress and the seeds of prosperity. It is always the intellectuals, a handful of people standing out from the common man, the cream of the society, that are responsible for initiating all experiments meant for achieving a better world. Intellectuals are born, but they need to be made as well. Persons with a composite outlook with a spirit of dedication, and ready to serve, are the people, who are now needed. Yuvabharathi, makes an attempt in this direction. Yuvabharathi's regular meetings are so patterned that they will inculcate in the members, the three most important qualities of clear thinking, better reading and effective speaking, which are very essential for the development of a composite personality. In short, Yuvabharathi is a training ground.

Yuvabharathi started in 1963, intends also to promote appreciation and keen awareness of the contribution of Telugu literature to the enrichment of our culture. We have carried out with great success varied programme of lectures, seminars, publications and the like, and have met with popular response.

Yuvabarathi consists mainly of lecturers, students and employed persons. We have also a Ladies' Wing. The total membership of Yuvabharathi is about a hundred.

Our Regular Activities

Yuvabharathi is a literary and cultural organisation with a difference. It is almost like a multi-purpose project. We meet every fortnight (first and third Sundays every month) in the premises of Sri Krishnadevaraya Andhra Bhasha Nilayam, Hyderabad. The three-hour programme includes lectures, discussions, short speeches, book discussions and reading one's own writings. The fortnightly programmes are so arranged that they will inculcate in the members the three important qualities of clear thinking, better reading and effective speaking which strengthen the roots of democracy. To provide the necessary background, we insist on critical reading of contemporary literary works. We are hopeful that a programme patterned on these lines, will enable the youth to lead fuller, richer, socially useful and more meaningful lives.

Our Publication Programme

The high cost of publication added to the huge costs of marketing, make it virtually difficult for a literary-minded middle class individual to buy good books and maintain a personal library at his house. Yuvabarathi with its idea of collecting pre-publication donations, has short-circuited the whole process, eliminated the middle men and had succeeded in reaching the reader directly. The resultant economies are of course being passed on to the reader by making available good books at unbeliveably low prices. The experiment has been an outstanding success. Not only this, when good literature is offered at a low price, obviously more number of people can be enthused to purchase the book.

During the eleven years of our existence. we have publishe 36 books of considerable literary merit (thirty four in Telugu and two in English), besides the souvenirs published to mark ou annual functions. The total number of copies of our publications printed so far exceeds the 2,25,000 mark. Quite a significant portion, about 80%, have already reached the homes of Telugu literary lovers, at very reasonable rates.

Sahithimitra

Yuvabharathi launched SAHITHIMITRA, a special programme in 1972, with the object of ensuring regular and continuous contact with Telugu literary lovers. About 8000 literary minded friends, extended their hands of co-operation and made it a success. A modified version was launched in December 1974 and about 2,000 have already joined this new scheme. We seek your active co-operation in reaching the 10,000 membership target. NANDINI - is a small monthly news letter, sent free to our Sahithimitras with a view to ensure continuous contact.

Sahitimitra-programme is an attempt to enlist the co-operation of literary minded freinds who wholly agree with the programmes of Yuvabharathi and are willing to actively participate and assist the programmes planned. Sahithimitra serves the purpose of ensuring a regular and continuous contact between the association and the literary lovers.

Yuvabharathi has succeeded in its experiment of printing large number of copies and offer them at a low pre-publication rate. We feel that by keeping the price of a good book at a low level it would attract many buyers. Half the battle is won when the good book is bought by the reader. We are sure that consistent contact with good books and persistent good reading will ensure the development of the most needed composite personality. Sahitimitra, as a progrmme, intends to involve such young men and women who are eager to join hands with Yuvabharathi, in its dedicated eudeavour, to serve the cause of Telugn literature and culture.

This programme envisages enrolment of persons at a nominal fee of Rs. 10/-per annum. Immediately books wroth Rs. 10/-

(in certain cases books worth Rs. 12/-) can be selected from the available publications of Yuvabharathi. The small monthly news tetter *Nandini* will be sent free for a period of 12 months ; and during this period the Sahithimitra is entitled to the privilege of buying other publications at 25% discount. More than all these, it is an expression of confidence and support and it is an expression of understanding and unity.

If a reading of this could convince you, please do write to us for details regarding the Sahtihimitra Programme.

Bharathi Mitra and Bharathi Bhushana

We have launched a fund-raising programme *Bharathi Mitra & Bharathi Bhushana,* so as to give a concrete shape to our future plans. So far about 500 people generously enrolled themselves under these schemes. We appeal to the public to come forward and donate liberally to this fund and help in placing Yuvabharathi on a firm footing.

Literature must succeed in teaching tolerance, propagating propriety, imbibing culture, generating goodwill and promoting patriotism. Only then, literature can succeed in creating ever-lasting freshness and breathe new life in the life of a nation. Yuvabharathi intends to create the most needed atmosphere for the proper understanding and spread of literary activities.

This is Yuvabhaɹathi. It is difficult to describe the intangible creative activities. Our literary programmes and publicaȷions are only an enlarged projcction of our dynamic effort and experiment in this direction.

We are sure, that you would really like the programmes of this nature to succeed. Please do help us to make our effort and experiment a grand success. Write to us for more details regardiag our Sahithimitra, Bharathimitra and Bharathi Bhushana schemes.

YUVABHARATHI, a Literary and Cultural Organisation,
5, Kingsway, Secunderabad-500 003. A.P.

A decade of Yuva Bharati

D. Anjaneyulu.

It is a wag's definition that a classic is a book that everybody talks about but nobody reads. Is this true of the Telugu classics as of the Sanskrit, not to speek of the Greek and the Latin ? Substantially, if not fully, could be a reasonable answer.

How many Telugu - speaking readers of the younger generation can claim to be familiar with such renowned classics as "Vasu Charitra", and 'Vijaya Vilaasam' Aamukta Maalyada' and 'Panduranga Maahatmiam' for instance ? Not this reader, certainly, who has only a nodding acquaintance and does not belong to the younger generation either !

People might know more of Varoodhini than of the rest of the 'Manu Charitra', of Satyabhama than of the rest of 'Paarijaataapaharanam'. And for obvious reasons too. Who does not indulge in the vicarious thrills of Sringara ? In fact, the pleasures of literature as a whole could be based on the theory of vicarious experience.

That apart, is it necessary that those hard-pressed for time in a frenzied world of soaring prices and pressing demands should devote their energies to matters not quite relevant to their immediate problems ? If it is indecd useful for them to know something of their literary heirtage, the bulk of them would prefer to do so without tears. One cannot ignore the spirit of the age— the age of made-easies and popularisers.

Classics made easy, expositions rendered popular—that was the formula adopted by Yuva Bharati which has just completed a decade of tireless work in the city of Hyderabad. It was largely a labour of love undertaken by a dedicated band of young men, fired by a love of Telugu literature and an eagerness to spread it among the literate public. The results achieved in these ten

years have been remakable. What is even more remarkable is that their enthusiasm shows no sign of waning.

The 'Kavya Lahari' programme of some years ago, covering the Pancha Kavyas of Telugu owed its phenomenal success as much to the Yuva-Bharati's flair for organisation and capacity for discipline as for the vast learning and spellbinding eloquence of Dr. D. V. Avadhani. The 'Mahati' volume of wide-ranging essays was a sort of "tour de force", rarely equalled in the field of voluntary effort. It is but fair that these and such other literary efforts are not subjected to too much of critical scrutiny.

More recently, the "Pratibha Lahari" a collection of expository lectures on great poets and writers, of the past and the present, is another notable publication. The subjects ranged from Srinatha and Sri Sri and included Tenali Rama Krishna, Panuganti and Viswanatha. All the lectures were delivered by reputed scholars, each well-versed in his subject. But if some of them were not quite as popular as the others, and if they as a whole, were not such sensational draws as the earlier 'Kavya Lahari' series, the organisers were not to blame.

As of now they have brought out 32 booklets, most of them slim in volume, but substantial in content. Each priced lower than a cinema ticket of a popular class the sales have touched the two-lakh mark. The credit is not entirely due to the moderate price. Much of it is due to the unremitting effort put in by every one of the members, on weekdays and on Sundays, by night and by day.

The titles included: "Viswanatha Kavita Vaibhavam" by J. Gautama Rao; "Tikkana Kavitaa Vaibhavam" by Dr. P. Madhava Sarma; "Sikharaaloo-Loyalu-renderings from Khalil Zibran" by Dr. C. Narayana Reddi; "Bhavana" an anthology of thoughts of the great and "Merupulu" poetic musing of Pollapalli Rama Rao, a farmer by profession and a poet by instinct.

Earlier, there were lectures on Potana, Vemana and others by popular poets like Narayana Reddi and Arudra. The printed versions of these have gone through more than one edition.

Even a commercial publishing house could look upon a record of this kind with satisfaction. It is not in the nature of the young men of Yuva Bharati to rest on their oars. They are launching on yet newer and more ambitious programmes. One is the 'Sahitee Vaahini' a series of over a dozen monographs on the great masters from Nannaya and Peddana to Timmana and Dhurjati, besides others on Urdu poetry, Hindi Poetry (Tulasi Das), Kannada poetry, Sarat Chandra Chatterji and others.

Immediately for the Sankranti of 1975, promise is held forth for the release of a few important publications. They are : "Marapurani Maneeshi" a gallery of living men of letters, by Tirumala Ramachandra, well-known scholar and journalist and a selection of film lyrics by C. Narayana Reddi.

Perhaps more important than these two is the volume in English, presenting studies of 25 outstanding Telugu novels. This last one could project the image of Yuva Bharati far beyond the limits of Andhra Pradesh.

Popularisation has perhaps its own limits, be it of literary classics or political ideas. Discrimnation might some times take a back seat, with critical acumen finding no place at all. But a well-meant exercise in spreading the appeal of the classics serves a social purpose. When it is done as a labour of love, there is all the need for a lusty cheer saying "more power to your elbow". Faint hearts and wet blankets could well afford to bide their time.

Courtesy : INDIAN EXPRESS,
(Januuary 11, 1975).



The Press Acclaims Our Activities

About 'Rachana' :

"Here is a book which throws a flood of light on the trends in contemporary Telugu journalism .... the printing and get up are extremely plcasing.

Yuvabharathi should continue to serve Telugu literature with more such publications".

THE INDIAN EXPRESS
Sptember 18, 1970.

"Here is an anthology of essays on the theme of great significance in the present context of changing values, written by men of literary eminence which should be read by all lovers of literature".

BHARATHI-a Telugu literary monthly,
October, 1970.

About 'Kavyalahari' :

"The Organisers of the series are members of the Yuvabharathi, a voluntary association of youthful lovers of Telugu literature, managed to enthuse many.."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
September 3, 1971.

"At the end of the lecture, one had to disperse with something of a wrench that the series was over all too soon. Thousands queued up at the eight counters set up for distribution of copies of the 'Kavyalahari' volume gaily got up in rainbow colours. It was a rare sight that heartened all lovers of literature from the scholar's closet the classics are atleast on the way out into the conference halls and the wide open spaces., not to speak of the clubs and coffee-houses."

THE INDIAN EXPRESS
September 19, 1971.

"Yuvabharathi has done a splendid job in bringing out this readable book in a beautiful form".

THE HINDU
November 28, 1971.

"Yuvabharathi has done a real service by publishing Dr. Avadhani's literary discourses which are informative, instructive, illuminating and also *inspiring*".

THE INDIAN EXPRESS
February 8, 1972

About Chaitanyalahari :

The Yuvabharati is an Institution of considerable standing, serving Telugu literature at much pain and cost and meriting public praise for its perseverance .... All the writers being specialists with a modern outlook, the lectures are interesting and revealing."

BHAVAN'S JOURNAL
September 16, 1973.

"........Yuvabharathi in its nine years of existence could do more than any other literary association, could achieve, despite their existence for decades. It has conducted many seminars and has published useful books which are collections of thought-provoking ideas from the learned men. At a time when it is difficult for any association to get 1,000 copies of a book printed, Yuvabharathi has printed 10,000 copies, 15,000 copies, 25,000 copies and has distributed them which has earned for it the affection and appreciation of the literary lovers. *Mahathi* stands out as a signal symbol of Yuvabharathi's work *Chaitanya-lahari*: literary lovers must read this book".

ANDHRA PRABHA-ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY
October 31, 1973.

About Mahathi :

"......It is given to Yuvabharathi to undertake this task in Telugu literature. It is a stupendous task to present to the general Telugu reader a comprehensive and systematized review of Telugu literary activities in a compact manner.

Yuvabharathi had done this not only competently but elegantly. It is doubtful if any other literary organisation could have succeeded to the same degree in this bewildering undertaking, especially when it is remembered that Yuvabharathi is not a commercial organisation and its resources are meagre. However, its organisers have stout hearts and sound brians. Its approach and accomplishment are excellent. Right from picking the authors to printing the articles, it was meticulous and systematic.

The result, naturally, is a near-perfect book—an anthology of one hundred articles by as many authors. The idea is simple but serious to give Telugus, a bird's eye view of the progress made in Telugu literary field during this quarter-century."

"*Chaitanyalahari* is another feather in Yuva bharathi's cap.... "

"If all Telugu literateurs and lovers co-operate with the dedicated band of Yuvabharathi whole-heartedly, Telugu literature is sure to grow."

THE INDIAN EXPRESS
December 16, 1972.

"......... Yuvabharathi must be complimented for its yeoman services to the language and literature during the short period of its existence......"

ANDHRA PRABHA-ILLUSTRATED WEEKLY
May 30, 1973.

"Yuvabharathi took up the publication of 'Mahathi' bravely. They have taken up a work which, either the government or the academies, with the help of the Government, should assume; assumption of such a task by an ordinary literary association and completing the task despite the difficulties and tensions undoubtedly deserves praise....".

BHARATHI
June 1973.

About Free India Forges Ahead :

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వెల్లువలా పారాలని
తెలుగింటిలో తెలుగుదీపం
అఖండంగా వెలగాలని
ఈ జాతి నిద్రలేచి
మహోన్నత మానవాదర్శాల వైపు
నిరంతర కృషితో
పయనం కొనసాగించాలనే ధ్యేయంతో
ఉడుతాభక్తిగా యువభారతి కృషి చేస్తున్నది
భాషాభిమానం కలగాలంటే
మాతృభాషా సాహిత్య పఠనమే
ప్రథమ కర్తవ్యం అనే భావం
బలంగా మనసులో నాటుకోవడానికి గాను
వీలైనంత ఎక్కువ మందికి వీలైనంత తక్కువ వెలకు
ఉత్తమసాహిత్యం అందించేందుకు
యువభారతి పూనుకున్నది
ప్రతి తెలుగింటిలో
కనీసం పదయినా తెలుగు పుస్తకాలు ఉండేందుకు
మనందరం ఉద్యమ వేగంతో కృషిచేద్దాం
ఆ పదిమంచి పుస్తకాలలో ఏ ఒక్కటిగానైనా
యువభారతి ప్రచురణ ఏ ఒక్కటైనా
ఉండాలనే ధ్యేయంతో కృషిచేద్దాం

యువభారతి

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